A PERIODICAL OF RECORD, REMNANT, AND QUESTIONABLE INTENTION
FOWL FEATHERED REVIEW
BANGOR MAINE ★ EST. MMX
ISSUE 263 SECOND EDITION
AEROSTATIC DOSSIER
QUALITY CONTROL QC INSPECTED & RESPECTED
AERO'S Δ-77.31(b)
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FOWL
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REVIEW

AEROSTATIC DOSSIER // △-77.31(B) / KNOCK

INDEX ∴ 4:13:4∞

Drifted as Utility Residue, Declared Sufficient

About the Asked (Collected Under Practice Conditions)

The FFR is no longer to be understood as a journal, nor as any prior category such as "Necrosign." It is instead a distributed production practice: a gathering-method for the generation, capture, and long-duration storage of emergent artifacts arising between human habit and mechanical repetition.

For ease of handling, we describe it as a shared frequency—commonly misidentified as the idle-pattern of a small automobile (late 20th-century compact class) standing in a parking lot at approximately 03:00—but this is merely the audible index-layer.

In its working state, the Assemblage conducts continuous retrieval from verifiable material domains: instruction sheets, retail surfaces, transit markings, service logs, and other document-objects of daily use. These are not preserved intact. They are subjected to pressure, displacement, and reclassification.

We do not curate in the modern sense. We maintain instead an Offenrückraum (open-back space), in which items may enter, settle, or misfile themselves.

Participants (hereafter: "important locals") are those who exhibit Dauerträgheit—a useful persistence under minor strain. Fragility is not prohibited, but it is structurally unsupported.

Any submission that appears to strive toward "Art" in the self-declarative sense will be reassigned to a more stable function (e.g., table-leveling, draft-blocking, oil-absorption). On the Operation of Source-Engines (Always in Partial Motion)

WARENREGISTERBRUCH (ARCADE INDEX CONDITION)

Fragments are extracted from catalogs, labels, packaging, and signage. Context is removed. Adjacency is reassigned. Authority increases in proportion to specificity, regardless of accuracy.

PROTOKOLLHäUFIGUNG (DOSSIER STACK CONDITION)

Records accumulate: maintenance notes, claims, timestamps. Gaps are preserved. Contradictions are not resolved. A sequence may appear, but closure is considered a filing error.

RANDBEMERKUNGSDRIFT (FALSE COMMENTATOR CONDITION)

Functional texts (manuals, glossaries, guides) are annotated beyond their tolerance. Explanations become misaligned. Confidence is retained.

ANWEISUNGSSCHNITT (CUT-UP RECORDER CONDITION)

Instruction-language is segmented and recombined. Repetition introduces rhythm. Meaning is reduced until only procedure-residue remains.

All outputs must retain Rückverfolgbarkeit (trace-feel): the impression that the fragment could be located again in some drawer, binder, or glove compartment.

Where this condition fails, the material is considered decorative and is removed.

A recurring sonic marker—transcribed provisionally as "dor"—is permitted to enter any layer. Its function remains under study.

ON REPURPOSING (IMPORTANT CLARIFICATION)

All submitted materials enter a Weiterverwendungskreis (cycle of further use). Possible outcomes include:

Inclusion as fragment within a larger construct

Mislabeling and redistribution

Use as structural support (physical or textual)

Reduction to residue for future recombination

Authors retain attribution only in the lowest archival sense. Function supersedes origin.

The current operational formula is recorded as:

$$[(\mathrm{DOR} \times 7)^2 + 11\mathrm{B}] \div \Sigma(\text{Loose Matter})$$

$$= 0.004 \text{ Useful Units}$$

Verification remains impossible due to kettle interference and unresolved parking-lot acoustics.

Delivery

Materials may be delivered, transmitted, or misplaced. Retrieval is opportunistic. Loss is considered a form of delayed submission.
LISTEN – OBSERVE
MISFILE – REPEAT
BE USEFUL
STAY LOOSE
NO LIMITS
NO END

THE STAFF (SINK-CUSTODIANS / FUNCTION-BEARERS)

Virgil Kay: Final Arbiter. Currently engaged in the classification of falling bakery items under aerodynamic variance. Maintains decision authority, though criteria are mobile.

Silent Bill: Overseer of Tactical Non-Sequiturs. Executes Satzabbruchhandlung (sentence-break action) by leaving mid-utterance. This is considered a valid editorial intervention.

Unkie Bob: Assigned to Casual Entropy. No longer dismantles structures directly; instead applies insufficient fastening (Lockerbefestigung), allowing failure to emerge without announcement.

The Unnamed Dishwasher: Not recorded in official listings. Present regardless. Performs continuous surface-

restoration under high focus. Functions as Kerntriebwerk (core engine). Prolonged observation is discouraged.

"NON IGNARA MALI, MISERIS SUCCERRERE DISCO."
— VIRGIL

Enter the New Breed
Cheap Chicken All Week
3.49 lb.
Gene Autry and William Boyd bought up the rights to all of their films and sold them to TV. The wise move made both men millionaires—Boyd from reruns of his Hopalong Cassidy series, and Autry from his own films plus his own television production company that released films through Columbia Studios.
POPEYE
CHOPPED SPINACH
The Drive-In is demolished
Page 4

Fowl Feathered Review

Treasury Cycle • Bangor Continuum Office • Issue ∞

REGISTRY OF MORTALITY & MOBILITY

Eternal Ledger / Nothing Occurs Once

City of Bangor
Treasury Office

All Times • All Versions
All Streets • All Layers

Docket No.
1911.1964.2026.
∞

Bangor, Maine
All Eras Simultaneous

City of Bangor — Continuously True — Non-Linear Seal ★

Compiled Simultaneously by Three Clerks of Time & City

Vincent of Beauvais
Temporal Index Clerk of Bangor

Author of the *Mirror of the World (and Municipal Supplements)*

Jacobus de Voragine
Restyler of Living Saints & Ongoing Events

Compiler of the *Golden Legend* (and Sidewalk Hagiographies)

Rashid al-Din Hamadani
Nonlinear Census Authority of Bangor

Historian of Worlds (and Their Overlapping *Municipalities*)

All entries co-signed under the doctrine: Nothing Here Occurs Once

I. On the Status of the Subject
(Who is also already filed elsewhere)

The subject enters City Hall, but also does not enter City Hall.

In one register, they are present.
In another, they are still approaching.
In a third, they have already left and are being reviewed for motion compliance.
They declare:
"Temporary in essence, ambulatory in function."

Vincent: *All functions are temporary. Essence is an indexing error.*

Jacobus: *The walker is always canonized mid-step.*

Rashid: *This person exists in at least three municipal centuries simultaneously.*

II. Registry of Mortality
(Mortality as distributed file)

Mortality is not recorded as an event.
It is filed as a recurring document with multiple timestamps.
— the subject is dead in 1914 (Opera House fire record layer)
— alive in 1964 (Urban Renewal testimony layer)
— unverified but walking in 2026 (current pedestrian index layer)
— and absent in a version of Bangor that has already been replaced by parking infrastructure

Jacobus: *Sainthood is what happens when death forgets which version it belongs to.*

Vincent: *Death is not an endpoint; it is a cross-reference.*

Rashid: *Mortality is a disagreement between archives.*

Virgil Kay (Editor Rooster China Wok Habitué) Stamps:
MORTALITY: SIMULTANEOUSLY ACTIVE / INACTIVE / RECURSIVE

III. Registry of Mobility
(Motion as Non-Linear Permission)

The footwear apparatus is inspected across multiple timelines:
— in one: it is shoes
— in another: it is wheels
— in another: it is evidence of municipal optimism
— in another: it has never been assembled but is still approved

When activated, it produces motion that does not relocate the subject so much as updates their position in different versions of the same street.

Vincent: *Movement is editorial revision applied to space.*

Jacobus: *The street blesses those who pass through its alternate drafts.*

Rashid: *Travel is what happens when cities disagree with themselves.*

Virgil Kay Stamps:
MORILITY: GRANTED ACROSS ALL KNOWN STREET VARIANTS

IV. The City Hall as Stacked Time Object

The Treasury Office is observed as:
- a room that exists in 1911 (fire memory layer)
- 1964 (planning abstraction layer)
- 1997 (restoration impulse layer)
- 2026 (current fluorescent administrative layer)
- and an unbuilt future where it is a parking lot remembering itself as a building

Walls contain:
- scroll fragments that have not yet been written
- newspaper clippings reporting future loss
- maps that disagree politely with each other
- stamps that remember being used differently

A Chant Moves Through All Layers at Once:

All permits are continuous
All streets are simultaneous
All walking is revisiting

V. Entities That Occur Outside Time but Inside Record

Paul Bunyan
(Scale Anomaly Witness Across Municipal Layers)
Appears in doorway, simultaneously too large for building and perfectly scaled for it.

Kenduskeag Sasquatch
(Hydrological Continuity Observer)
Waits without waiting; is always already leaving. Witnesses every flood at once.

The Creamsicle Freezer of Outer Bangor Lot
(Perpetual Cold Object)
Contains identical creamsicles in every recorded year. Temperature does not change; only interpretation does.

VI. Footnotes (*which occur before and after the text*)

[1] Vincent of Beauvais:
"The archive is not storage; it is simultaneity with filing cabinets."

[2] Jacobus de Voragine:
"Legends are what happens when the present refuses to stay in its assigned tense."

[3] Rashid al-Din Hamadani:
"Bangor cannot be dated. It can only be approached from different administrative angles."

[4] Virgil Kay:
Stamped note: roller-blade sneakers classified as lateral time instruments.

VII. Questions That Cannot Be Answered Because They Are Still Occurring

1. Is the subject entering City Hall, or has City Hall entered the subject?
2. If a building burns in one layer but is restored in another, which version requires permits?
3. Do wheels move a person, or move the street under them?
4. Who signs a document that has already been signed in a different century?
5. Is the creamsicle freezer a place, a memory, or a recurring municipal exception?
6. When Paul Bunyan leaves, does he exit or simply change scale context?
7. Does the Sasquatch require a tax category or a new ontology?

1911: The Great Fire

1914: Opera House Burns

1920: Rebuilt in Style

1964: Urban Renewal Vote

1997: Restoration Begins

2026: Jane's Walks

What's not there and what could be.

All Things Temporary All The Time

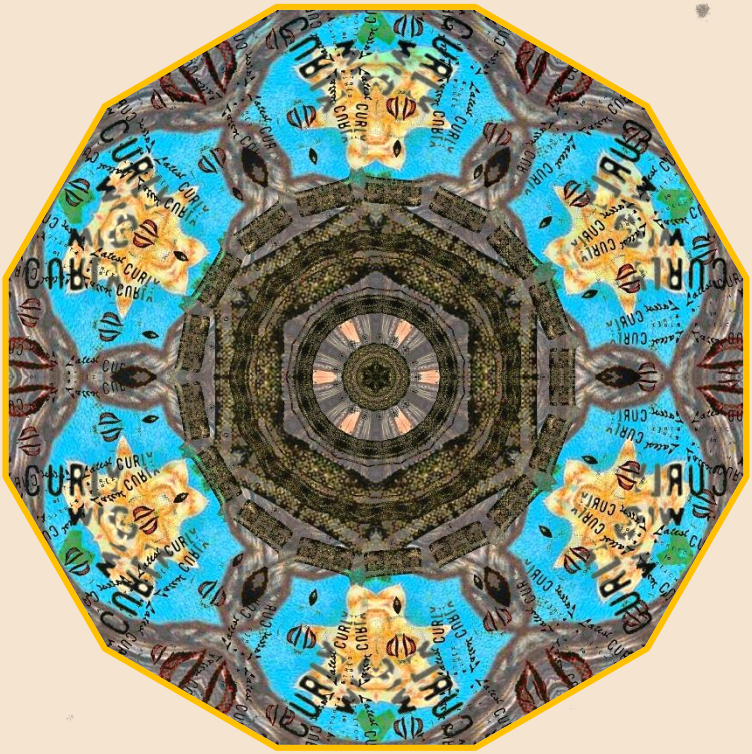
This Document Exists In All Its Dates At Once
∞

Subject Released Into Continuous Sidewalk Status
City of Bangor Continues Self-Revision
∞

Final Entry (Non-Terminal)

NOTHING IS FILED ONCE
NOTHING IS OVER
NOTHING IS BEFORE OR AFTER WITHOUT PERMISSION

Virgil Kay
Editor Rooster China Wok Habitué
Treasury Clerk & Stamper of Conditional True Things
Virgil Kay



Dream Breaths

By Augustus Reeves

Five breaths gather dusk

Seven stars wait without names

Five dreams open slow

The pillow listens

Night folds its careful paper

Mind becomes feather

Crickets keep the count

Moonlight forgets every wall

Blankets learn the wind

A train leaves the day

Windows fill with quiet hills

No one needs to wave

Old worries unlace

Shoes remain beside the bed

Feet enter the clouds

An owl turns once more

The dark remembers my name

Then forgets it well

Snow falls without sound

The clock misplaces an hour

Time curls up to rest

Dreams light small lanterns

Each one floating down the stream

None asks where to land

Morning waits outside

Patient as unopened mail

Sleep keeps one more page

Five breaths become one

Seven becomes endless sky

Five becomes silence

FLUXUS POETRY SERIES

CANTO: THE WAKEFIELD DEFINITION

By Jonah Wheatfield

FLUX-POST CARD # 1125

AIR MAIL

THIS END TO BE UP

Who demands the plan to unhinge
the door to life?
Enters like a pettifogger,
mouth of the pleb,
Crying: Verba mea veritas!
The red-haired bitch strikes him.

Sees a friend—morrow or dinner,
Grandchildren at it in Wakefield,
Crime's tide year-long at the Walper.
Unfinished.

VERBA MEA VERITAS

WAKEFIELD DEFINITION

5 VIBRATIONS:
Red
Blue—sudden
Red
Blue

Fair eyes, arcanum, the night's refusal.
A wench on the Tube, the electronic screech,
Christ's caput, centum dies,
The mother demands it again.
Blue plummets. Five vibrations:
Red, blue—sudden, red, blue.
Product pressure. The nose. The fish.
Lydia to the dust. Os Dei.

FLUXUS INTERNATIONL UNIVERSIT

TOP SECRET

LYDIA TO THE DUST

centum dies
o os dei

At last, folk in good temper,
Positive labor, a triumph botched.
Tony cast from the constabulary,
Origin in six points of pain,
Good health, seeing the rot around,
Silk hues, a new epiphany.
Aid possible.
1125. Sudden seizure from without.

His eyes to the door, untired.
The station stormed.
Within, shifts done,
All gyrate on the news,
Anthony's web, Edward, and water.

THE WALPER
THE TUBE
ELECTRONIC SCREECH

START WITH
PAUL'S DATA
SALT

PRODUCT RATIO—
ONE BAR ENOUGH
TO COMMENCE ?

TONY CAST FROM THE CONSTABULARY

Make haste! A word to be said,
A fine macaw, and sudden the
snare of the offer.
Start with Paul's data, salt,
product ratio—
One bar enough to commence?
Sees coffee, longs for home
or back to the man,
Khan, the other boy breathing.

FILE UNDER X—23

MACIUNAS 68

1125
SUDDEN SEIZURE FROM WITHOUT

All prescribe the heart-cure.
Cut the blind neurosis—
Feel like a strange boy; can ye walk?
Twelve peasants buy sorrow.
But when was John whole?

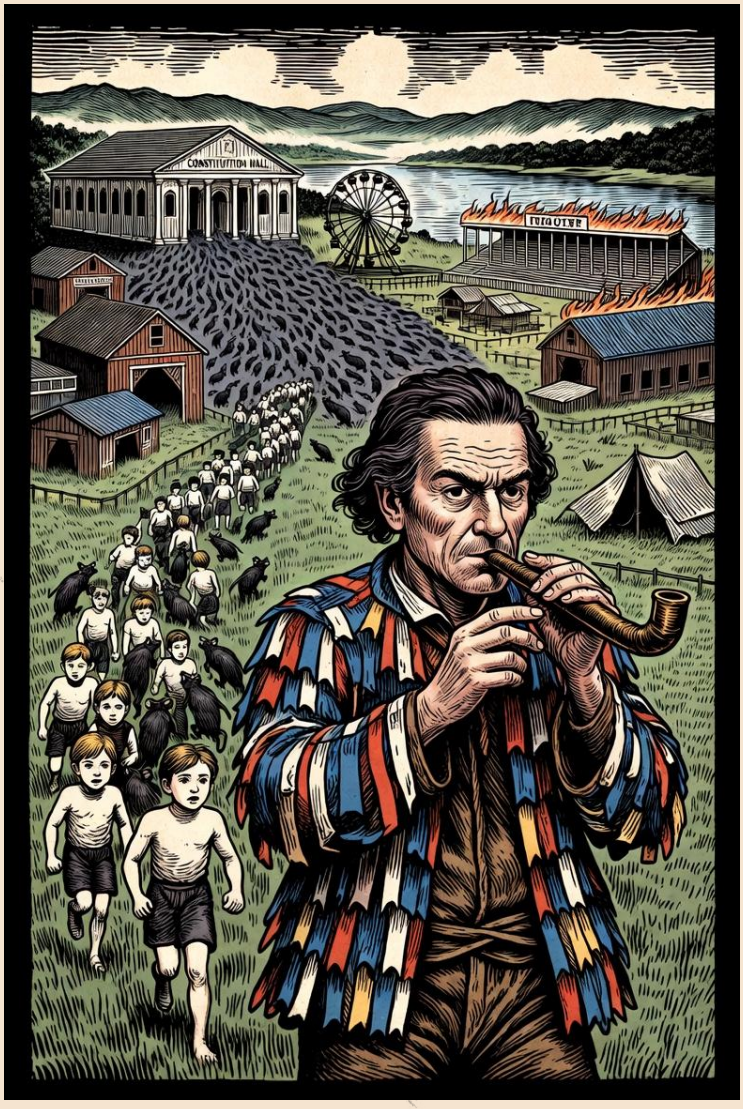
ORIGIN IN SIX POINTS OF PAIN
GOOD HEALTH
SEEING THE ROT AROUND
SILK HUES
A NEW EPIPHANY
AID POSSIBLE

COFFEE

BUT WHEN WAS JOHN WHOLE ?

?

FLUXUS EDITIONS NEW YORK


CONSTITUTION HALL

THE PIED PIPER OF SKOWHEGAN

By Lauren Hester

The rats came first to Constitution Hall.

Not the original Constitution Hall—that one burned in March of 1999, along with the grandstand, along with the RVs and the boats and the automobiles stored inside, along with whatever else fire decides to eat when an arsonist feeds it. The arsonist turned himself in. The building was rebuilt in time for that year's fair, thanks to the many generous donors of the "Fair Time '99" Fundraiser Program.

The replacement of the Constitution Hall. The one that carries the seam of the original in its foundation, the way a repaired cup carries the memory of the break.

The rats appeared in the walls first. Then in the Bingo Hall on Beech Street—the lot purchased in 2005. Then in the Donald Eames Flower Building, named for his longtime dedication. Then in the Forrest "Bud" Stevens Memorial Paddock. The rats did not respect memorial names. They nested in the sediment between

what a place is called and what a place remembers.

Fair manager Brenda Thibodeau found droppings in the premium book storage. Found gnaw marks on the electrical conduit running to the Beer Garden—"The Stable," as it was known after the Midway Hall was repurposed in 2001. Found a nest constructed from shredded pages of the 2025 daily schedule, threads of cotton candy packaging, and a fragment of a poster advertising Joey Chitwood's Auto Thrill Show, 1997.

The rats had built their home from the fair's own archive.

MERCER'S HOME FURNISHINGS — SUMMER BLOWOUT SALE

149 Madison Avenue, Skowhegan, ME 04976

(207) 474-8553

EVERYTHING MUST GO — STORE CLOSING AFTER 31 YEARS

La-Z-Boy Greyson Rocker Recliner (Chestnut) $899 NOW $449

Ashley Realyn Oval Dining Table w/ 6 Chairs $2,147 NOW $1,074

Serta Perfect Sleeper Queen Mattress Set $1,299 NOW $599

Lane Cedar Hope Chest (Oak Finish) $479 NOW $199

Broyhill Attic Heirlooms 5-Drawer Chest $1,150 NOW $575

Child's Maple Rocking Chair (Handmade, Cornville) $225 NOW $112

GE 18 cu. ft. Top-Freezer Refrigerator (White) $849 NOW $424

ALL FLOOR MODELS ADDITIONAL 20% OFF

FREE DELIVERY SOMERSET COUNTY

OPEN MON–SAT 9–5, SUN 11–4

"Furnishing Somerset County Since 1995"

MercersHomeSkowhegan.com

He came across the Kennebec walking bridge from the Madison side, which is to say he arrived from a direction that doesn't entirely exist anymore—the bridge is there, but the purpose of

crossing has weathered. He was not dressed in pied clothing exactly. He wore:

A jacket made from what appeared to be old fair ribbons—the blue and red and white and yellow of First Place, Second Place, Best in Show, Honorable Mention—stitched together in a pattern that suggested the ribbons had belonged to different decades. Some were satin. Some were grosgrain. Some bore the faded legend SOMERSET CENTRAL AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY, a name that had been continued until 1942, when the official designation became the Skowhegan State Fair.

He carried something that was not exactly a pipe. It was an instrument made from—

Here the archive becomes uncertain.

Some said it was a tin whistle soldered from old canning lids.

Some said it was a length of copper tubing from the old dairy barn plumbing.

Some said it was a smartphone playing a frequency that only the young could hear, which is a modern legend that has itself become a

fossil—the explanation gone, the anxiety preserved.

He walked up Constitution Avenue—33 Constitution Avenue, Skowhegan, Maine, 04976—and he said:

"I understand you have a problem with what accumulates."

The selectmen met him in the fair office, a building that has served multiple purposes across multiple generations, the way all buildings in a town of continuous habitation eventually become palimpsests of their own intentions.

The Piper said: "I will remove what infests your grounds. I will clear the barns, the halls, the paddock, the camping area that accommodates 200 campers with water and electricity plus a limited quantity of sewer sites."

The selectmen said: "What do you want?"

"One thousand guilders."

"We don't have guilders. This is Maine."

"Then whatever one thousand guilders translates to after eight centuries of inflation, currency

conversion, and the general weathering of monetary systems."

Someone calculated on their phone. Someone else said the phone calculation couldn't be right. A third person noted that the original Hamelin burgermeister had promised a thousand and then tried to pay fifty, which adjusts the moral economy considerably.

They settled on the prize money offered by the fair, exceeding $200,000. That contrasts with approximately $3,000.00 that was offered over 90 years ago.

"Done," the Piper said.

MERCER'S HOME FURNISHINGS — CLOSEOUT PRICING — THIS WEEK ONLY

149 Madison Avenue, Skowhegan, ME 04976

Bassett Mirror Company Thoroughly Modern Dining Buffet $1,675 NOW $679

Sealy Posturepedic Twin XL (Perfect for Camp or Dorm) $599 NOW $279

Used Ethan Allen Georgian Court Nightstand (Pair) — $150/pair AS IS

Flexsteel Thornton Sofa (Tan Fabric, Floor Model) $1,899 NOW $799

Ashley Trinell Full Bookcase Bed w/ Storage $749 NOW $375

Maytag Top-Load Washer/Dryer Set (White) $1,598 NOW $899

Handmade Pine Deacon's Bench, 5-ft (Canaan craftsman) $600 NOW $300

Wooden High Chair (Maple, Refinished) — $45

NOTE: The Ethan Allen nightstands came from an estate on Water Street. The family name is crossed out on the delivery tag but the address is still legible. Inside the left nightstand drawer, the staff found a child's drawing of a rooster done in orange crayon and a Beechnut gum wrapper that had been flattened and folded into a bookmark shape. These items are in a Ziploc bag taped to the back of the right nightstand. They are included with purchase. They are not priced separately because some things resist pricing. The staff considered throwing them away and did not.

FREE DELIVERY SOMERSET COUNTY — CASH, CHECK, VISA/MC

(207) 474-8553

He played.

What he played:

The sound contained the cadence of a harness race—the particular rhythm of standardbred hooves on a half-mile track, a rhythm that has been continuous at Skowhegan since before Maine was a state, since the fair was held in January of 1819 by the Somerset Central Agricultural Society, when it attracted the largest crowds ever to have assembled in Somerset County, which was at the time located in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The sound contained the memory of Eleazer Coburn's voice, and Richard Sawtelle's voice after him in 1820, though no recording exists of either and the archive builds only from surviving traces—the names on a list, the cadence of authority that a name carries forward after the voice has vanished.

The sound contained the particular frequency of a wooden grandstand burning at three in the morning in March of 1999, which is a sound nobody wanted to archive but which the town's memory preserved anyway because buried does not mean dead; buried means exerting pressure underground.

The rats heard it. All of them.

They came from Constitution Hall and from the Flower Building and from the paddock and from the camping area and from the old foundation lines where the previous grandstand—the one built in 1935 to replace the one that succumbed to fire in 1934—had left its footprint in the soil. They came from the Bingo Hall on Beech Street. They came from storage areas that hadn't been opened since the early 1990s renovations.

He walked east, toward the Kennebec. The rats followed.

He did not walk them into the river. This is Maine, not medieval Germany, and the DEP has regulations about mass wildlife disposal in navigable waterways. He walked them to the edge of the fairgrounds and into the woods beyond,

past where the property lines become uncertain, past where the fair's jurisdiction gives way to the ordinary wilderness of central Somerset County, and the rats dispersed into the landscape that had produced them, which is to say into the accumulation of years that produces all infestation—the surplus, the uncounted, the thing that breeds when nobody is paying attention.

The selectmen would not pay.

This is the structural beam of the story—the settled memory, the part that has survived every retelling since 1284 because it contains the fundamental human contradiction: we request help, we receive help, we deny that help was necessary.

Their reasons, preserved in various states of damage:

"The rats would have left anyway. It's August. They always move before the fair opens on the thirteenth."

"We never signed anything. Show us a contract. Show us a purchase order. Show us a line item in the municipal budget."

"That wasn't music. That was a noise ordinance violation."

"The fair has operated continuously since 1818. Two hundred and seven years. We did not survive this long by paying strangers two hundred thousand dollars for pest control."

One selectman, whose family name had appeared in Somerset County records since before Maine's statehood, said something that the archive preserves without resolving:

"We are the oldest consecutively running agricultural fair in the nation. We don't owe our continuity to pipers."

The Piper stood in the doorway of the fair office. The light behind him came through a window and caught the ribbons of his jacket so that for a moment he appeared to be wearing stained glass—which is how the earliest account of the Hamelin event was preserved, in a church window placed c. 1300, destroyed in 1660, reconstructed by historian Hans Dobbertin from surviving descriptions.

He said: "I'll come back."

MERCER'S HOME FURNISHINGS — FINAL DAYS

149 Madison Avenue, Skowhegan

FLOOR MODEL CLEARANCE — ALL PRICES FIRM — NO HOLDS

Riverside Coventry Executive Desk (Weathered Driftwood finish) $1,450 NOW $580

Riverside Coventry Lateral File Cabinet (matching) $875 NOW $350

Vaughan-Bassett Rustic Hills Queen Sleigh Bed $1,299 NOW $519

3-Piece Living Room Set: Sofa, Loveseat, Chair (Sage Green Microfiber, manufacturer unknown, tags removed) — $400 for all three

Metal Patio Glider (White, needs repainting, works fine) — $35

Lot of 14 Assorted Table Lamps — $10 each or $100 for all

Box of Miscellaneous Drawer Pulls, Knobs, and Hinges — $25

The sage green living room set came in on trade from a family in Norridgewock. The wife said the sofa was her mother-in-law's and the mother-in-law was her husband's mother and the husband had died and the mother-in-law had died and the wife was moving to Auburn to be near her daughter and she didn't want the furniture and she didn't want to throw it away and she didn't know what she wanted except to not be the last person sitting on it. The cushions smell faintly of woodsmoke and Jean Naté. The middle cushion of the sofa has a permanent depression on the left side where someone always sat. The staff asked if she wanted anything for the set and she said just get it out of the house before I change my mind.

It is not the staff's job to determine what a piece of furniture carries besides upholstery.

They set the price at $400 for all three pieces because that is what the market will bear and because $400 is the distance between an object and its next life.

(207) 474-8553 — OPEN 7 DAYS THROUGH END OF MONTH

August 13, 2026. The gates opened at the usual hour. The camping area filled—200 sites, water and electricity, limited sewer. The harness racing began in the Bud Stevens Paddock. Livestock exhibitors arrived from more than one hundred towns and cities in Maine as well as from many states throughout the nation and as far away as the State of Washington. Exhibition workers and performers now numbered over 7,000.

The children came.

They always come. That is what fairs are for. That is what fairs have always been for—the expressed purpose being to improve the breeding of livestock, yes, but the actual purpose, the buried purpose, the one that has exerted pressure since January 1819, is the gathering of generations in a single field, the overlay of grandparent and grandchild on the same sawdust, the same fried dough, the same Ferris wheel whose lights are the same lights that have been the same lights since the concept of night shows before the grandstand developed over ninety years ago.

The children came to the midway. The children came to the livestock barns—the Horse/Cattle

Barn built in 1999, the second one built in 2004 to replace the older barns. The children came to the games of skill and chance, which seem to prove that human nature basically doesn't change too much with the passage of time. The children came with cellular phones and the children came with sticky hands and the children came as the children of the children who came before them, which is the fair's deepest archive—not the premium books, not the photographs, not the buildings that burn and are rebuilt, but the inheritance of attendance itself.

On the midway, a child won a stuffed rooster at a ring-toss booth.

The rooster was orange. Synthetic plush. Made in a factory whose location appeared on no label.

The child named it. The name is not recorded.

In Hamelin there is a street called Bungelosenstrasse—"street without drums"—the last place the children were seen. Ever since, music or dancing is not allowed on this street.

In Skowhegan there is no such street. But there is the stretch of Constitution Avenue between the

fair entrance and the river, and on the morning of the seventh day, someone noticed that the PA system wasn't working in that section. The speakers had been gnawed through—not by rats, which had been removed, but by the memory of rats, which is to say by the wire degradation that occurs when copper has been stressed by rodent proximity over years and finally gives way after the source of stress has departed, the way a bone breaks not during the fall but during the landing.

No music played on Constitution Avenue.

The children heard something else instead.

MERCER'S HOME FURNISHINGS — GOING OUT OF BUSINESS — EVERYTHING MUST GO

149 Madison Avenue, Skowhegan, ME 04976

STORE FIXTURES NOW FOR SALE

Glass Display Case, 6-ft, Lighted (2 available) — $175 each

Steel Shelving Units, 8-ft (7 available) — $60 each

Cash Register Counter (Oak Veneer, Built-In Drawers) — $200

Pegboard Panels w/ Hardware (assorted sizes) — $15 each

Delivery Truck: 2011 Ford E-350 Box Van, 147K miles, runs good, new brakes 2024 — $8,500 OBO

Fluorescent Light Fixtures, 4-ft (23 available) — $5 each

Hand Truck — $25

Store Sign ("MERCER'S HOME FURNISHINGS — Furnishing Somerset County Since 1995") — FREE TO GOOD HOME

The sign is 4 feet by 12 feet, painted on MDO plywood, professionally lettered by Gerry Dostie of Dostie Signs in Waterville, who has since retired. The paint is Benjamin Moore exterior latex in Hunter Green and Ivory. The apostrophe in MERCER'S was repainted in 2003 after a snowplow threw a chunk of ice that chipped it, and if you look closely the replacement apostrophe is a slightly different shade of ivory because the original formula had been discontinued and the new match was close but not exact. Carl Mercer kept the chipped paint fragment in his desk drawer for reasons he did not

explain to his employees. His wife found it after he died and put it in the Ziploc bag with the other small things from his desk—a bent paper clip, two Canadian quarters, a stick of Beechnut gum still in its wrapper, and a photograph of the store taken on opening day in 1995 showing Carl and his brother Dale standing in front of an empty showroom floor that would, over the next thirty-one years, hold approximately nine thousand pieces of furniture, each of which went somewhere and became part of someone's life and is now in various states of continued use, storage, donation, abandonment, and decay across Somerset County and beyond, though the store's delivery records—which would constitute a comprehensive map of where the furniture went—were kept in a filing cabinet that was water-damaged when the roof leaked in 2019 and most of the older records are now illegible.

The sign is free. Take it or it goes to the dump.

The dump will not refuse it. The dump does not refuse anything. That is the dump's entire operating principle, which is the opposite of a furniture store's operating principle, which is selection, and the opposite of a fair's operating

principle, which is display, and the opposite of a legend's operating principle, which is repetition of what matters until what matters is all that remains.

(207) 474-8553 — FINAL WEEKEND — SATURDAY 9-5, SUNDAY 11-4, MONDAY CLOSED FOREVER

He came back on the eighth day of the fair, which is to say on August 20th, which is a Thursday, which carries no particular saint's name but carries instead the accumulated weight of the eighth day of every Skowhegan fair that has ever run ten days, which is a specific kind of pressure that only a town with 207 consecutive fairs can generate.

He was dressed differently now.

Not in ribbons. In green. Like a hunter, the old accounts say. But the green was the green of a John Deere cap and a canvas Carhartt jacket and rubber Muck boots—the green of rural Maine, the green of someone who works the land rather than merely appearing upon it. He looked, in other words, like a lokator—a medieval recruitment officer—but translated into the present tense,

which is to say he looked like every person who has ever arrived in a small town with a better offer.

"After the defeat of the Danes at the Battle of Bornhöved in 1227," explains linguist Jürgen Udolph, "the region south of the Baltic Sea became available for colonization by the Germans." The bishops and dukes sent out glib locators offering rich rewards to those willing to move to the new lands.

The Piper played.

And the children—

One hundred and thirty children.

That is the Hamelin number. Centum ter denos. CXX. It appears on every surviving inscription, in every manuscript, in every verse. It is the number that has survived eight centuries of weathering, erosion, drift, flood, faulting, and mineralization. It is the fossil number. The meaning may be forgotten. The number remains.

At the Skowhegan State Fair on August 20, 2026, the number was different. Or the same. Or it existed in several states simultaneously, because

the archive does not collapse possibilities prematurely. It allows them to coexist.

The children followed the Piper:

past the grandstand—the one built in the summer of 1999, finished just in time for that year's fair;

past the site of the 1912 landing where Aviator D. Kennalie's plane was badly damaged upon return;

past the camping area with its 200 sites;

past the property line on Beech Street;

past the Kennebec, which is not the Weser but which serves the same narrative function—the river that divides here from gone;

toward Norridgewock. Toward Canaan. Toward Cornville. Toward the hills of Somerset County, which are not the Koppen hills of the German inscription but which are hills, and the word Koppen means knoll or domed hill, and which of them was intended by the manuscript's author remains uncertain, and uncertainty is not failure but the condition in which meaning continues to generate.

Three remained behind.

One could not follow because she was working the ticket booth and could not leave her post, which is the modern version of lameness—not a physical impairment but an obligation that prevents departure.

One could not hear the music because he was wearing noise-canceling headphones connected to his phone, playing a podcast about true crime, which is the modern version of deafness—not a sensory absence but an attention directed elsewhere.

One could not see where the others were going because she was in the Bingo Hall and the windows faced the wrong direction, which is the modern version of blindness—not an optical failure but an architectural obstruction.

These three informed the townsfolk of what had happened.

The townsfolk came out from the Beer Garden.

MERCER'S HOME FURNISHINGS

149 Madison Avenue, Skowhegan, ME 04976

CLOSED

The building is empty now. The fluorescent fixtures were bought by a church in Hartland. The glass display cases went to an antique dealer in Fairfield. The delivery truck sold to a landscaper in Pittsfield for $7,800, which was $700 below asking, which Carl's daughter accepted because she was tired and because $700 is not a meaningful distance when measured against thirty-one years.

The cash register counter is still inside. Nobody wanted it. It is oak veneer over particleboard and it weighs approximately 300 pounds and it has no value except as the surface across which every transaction in the store's history was conducted—every check written, every credit card swiped, every handshake that sealed a deal on a living room set that would, over the following years, absorb the particular smell and weight and argument and tenderness of the family that bought it.

The counter has a gouge on the left side where Dale Mercer dropped a cast-iron doorstop sample in 1998. The gouge was never repaired. It became part of the counter. It became, over time, the place where Carl rested his left hand while

talking to customers, his thumb fitting into the groove the way a body fits into a landscape it has occupied long enough.

Inside the center drawer of the counter, which does not lock and never has, there is:

a 2019 Skowhegan State Fair schedule (water-stained)

a ballpoint pen from Skowhegan Savings Bank

a business card for a chimney sweep in Solon who went out of business in 2021

three rubber bands (brittle)

a napkin from the Bankery on Water Street with a phone number written on it in pencil (the pencil has faded to the point where only the area code—207—is legible, which in Maine is every phone number and therefore no phone number)

and a child's drawing of a rooster, done in orange crayon, on the back of a Mercer's delivery receipt dated June 2014

The drawing is not the same drawing found in the Ethan Allen nightstand.

It is a different drawing of a rooster by what appears to be a different child.

Or the same child at a different age.

Or a different child who drew the same rooster because roosters, like legends, recur.

The building at 149 Madison Avenue will be listed for sale by Coldwell Banker Plourde Real Estate. The listing will describe it as "commercial space, 4,200 sq ft, municipal water/sewer, oil heat, paved parking for 12." The listing will not mention Carl or Dale or the gouge in the counter or the thirty-one years of furniture that passed through the showroom on its way to becoming the interior architecture of Somerset County's domestic life. The listing will not mention the child's drawing. Listings do not mention drawings. Listings are not archives.

But the building will remember. Buildings remember differently from people. Buildings remember through the nail holes that remain after the shelving is removed, through the carpet wear patterns that map where customers stood longest, through the particular shade of paint on the wall behind where the La-Z-Boy display used

to be—a shade two tones lighter than the surrounding wall because the recliners blocked the sunlight for seventeen years and the wall behind them aged differently, the way a person ages differently in the places that are sheltered.

(207) 474-8553 — THIS NUMBER HAS BEEN DISCONNECTED

Anno 2026 am dage des achten Tages war der 20. August dorch einen Piper mit allerley Farve bekledet gewesen—

No. The inscription is not in Low German. It is in the language that survives here, which is:

IN THE YEAR 2026 ON THE EIGHTH DAY OF THE NATION'S OLDEST CONSECUTIVELY RUNNING AGRICULTURAL FAIR 130 CHILDREN BORN IN SKOWHEGAN AND SURROUNDING TOWNS WERE LURED BY A PIPER CLOTHED IN MANY COLORS TO THE HILLS NEAR THE KENNEBEC AND LOST

This inscription does not appear on any building.

It appears in the gap between what the fair's official history records and what the town remembers when the lights on the midway go

dark after closing night on August 22nd and the exhibitors pack their trailers and the camping area empties and the grounds return to the condition they occupy for the other 355 days of the year, which is the condition of waiting, which is itself a form of memory.

Various theories have arisen.

The children simply grew up and left, as children in Somerset County have been leaving for decades—for Portland, for Boston, for anywhere the economy offers more than a ten-day fair can provide. The Piper was not a person but a condition: the slow music of opportunity playing from elsewhere, audible only to those young enough to follow it. The three who remained behind were those with obligations, those with their attention elsewhere, and those who could not see the exit. The town records their departure as loss. The children record it as departure. Both memories become part of the landscape.

Udolph's research applies. The family names common to Skowhegan—Thibodeau, Quirion, Poulin, Lessard—show up with surprising frequency in the areas of southern New

Hampshire and the suburbs north of Boston, as if a trail of etymology runs from the Kennebec Valley to the Route 93 corridor. Local telephone books—or their digital equivalent, the Facebook profiles and LinkedIn pages—list names apparently derived from the original village. In fact, the names include Skowhegan, and Skow, and variations that preserve the sound after the place has been left behind.

The children were seized by something. TikTok. The algorithmic feed that plays a silver pipe of the most magnificent sort and leads the young to the execution place of attention—the place where they proceed to vanish, so that no trace of them could be found by parents who still navigate by older maps.

There were characters known as lokators who roamed northern Germany trying to recruit settlers for the East. Some of them were brightly dressed, and all were silver-tongued. The modern equivalent is the college recruiter, the military recruiter, the tech company scout, the influencer who says follow me and I will show you a beautiful land. The townspeople made up this story instead of recording the facts to avoid the

wrath of the church or the king—or, in the modern version, to avoid acknowledging that a town's children are not a town's possessions.

The grandstand burned in 1934. The replacement burned in 1999. The arsonist turned himself in. But what if the Piper is not a person but the recurring principle of destruction that precedes rebuilding? What if the children are not children but the things a community loses and reconstructs, the way the fair rebuilt Constitution Hall in a single summer, the way the Flower Building rose in 2001, the way each loss produces a memorial name—Donald Eames, Forrest "Bud" Stevens—that carries the person forward into the architecture of what remains?

After the children left, someone had to:

close the ticket booth,

shut down the PA system,

lock the livestock barns,

drain the water hookups in the camping area,

file the insurance paperwork,

sweep the midway,

collect the abandoned stuffed roosters,

turn off the lights on the Ferris wheel one bulb at a time,

and call the parents.

That person's name does not appear in the legend. It never does.

The legend remembers the Piper. The legend remembers the children. The legend remembers the burgermeister who refused to pay.

The legend does not remember the person who stayed.

The person who cleaned up afterward.

The person who reopened the gates the following August, because the fair has run consecutively since 1818, and consecutively means including the year after the children left, and including the year after that, and the year after that, because continuity is not the absence of loss but the decision to continue after loss, which is the oldest agricultural act there is—the decision to plant again in soil that has already failed to produce what was promised.

MERCER'S HOME FURNISHINGS

149 Madison Avenue

Skowhegan, Maine 04976

ESTATE/LIQUIDATION — FINAL NOTICE

One (1) oak veneer cash register counter, approx. 300 lbs, gouge on left side. Contains miscellaneous drawer contents. Available for pickup. No charge. Bring help and a truck.

One (1) child's drawing, orange crayon on delivery receipt.

The drawing is not for sale. The drawing will remain in the drawer of the counter and will go wherever the counter goes and will be found again by whoever next opens that drawer, which may be tomorrow or never, and either way the drawing will continue to exist inside the closed drawer in the state that physicists call superposition and that the rest of us call forgotten but not gone, which is the state that everything in this story occupies—the children, the rats, the Piper, the fair, the furniture, the town, the rooster, the gum wrapper, the apostrophe, the fire, the rebuilding, the names of

the dead attached to the buildings of the living, and the sound of music on a street where music is no longer played.

The Skowhegan State Fair opened in August 2027. And 2028. And every year after, as it had every year since 1818, because that is what the fair does. That is what consecutively means. The nation's oldest consecutively running agricultural fair does not stop for pipers. It did not stop for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts becoming the State of Maine. It did not stop for wars or boom times or depression years or the computer age or the internet. It did not stop for fire in 1934 or fire in 1999.

It carries the seam.

The seam is visible. On the fairgrounds at 33 Constitution Avenue, between the grandstand and the river, there is a place where the grass grows differently—greener in one strip, as if the soil remembers something the surface does not. The old-timers say that's where the parade route used to run. The children say that's where the Piper walked.

Both memories become part of the landscape.

The crack is not damage.

The crack is where inheritance enters.

office@skowheganstatefair.com

(207) 474-2947

August 13–22, 2026

No music on Constitution Avenue.

Nothing returns unchanged.

Nothing survives alone.

Everything carries evidence of the hands that kept it alive.

ARCHIVNÍ
OVESNÉ
VLOČKY

THE ARCHIVE'S OBJET PETIT A

Or: A Municipal Inquiry Into the Semiotics of the Unreturnable, Presented in Several Tableaux for the Edification of Nobody in Particular

AN INVOCATION, DELIVERED IN THE MANNER OF A MAN WHO HAS READ TOO MUCH AND SLEPT ON THE WRONG SIDE OF HIS OWN FOOTNOTES

One must begin, as all honest inquiries into municipal ontology must begin, by conceding that the engine does not run on gasoline, nor on grant money, nor on the thin gruel of civic goodwill dispensed twice yearly at budget hearings attended by nine people and a stenographer who has stopped listening; the engine runs, rather, on agreement, the specific and undocumented agreement a town makes with itself each morning before anyone has had the poor judgment to wake up and notice, an agreement so total, so unexamined, so structurally indistinguishable from a religious observance that one hesitates — pace certain fashionable continental theorists who have made careers of hesitating — to call it anything so vulgar as "custom," when in fact what it most resembles is a species of transference, the town projecting onto itself the authority it secretly suspects it

does not possess, and idling there, at the corner of Harlow Street and what can only be called Indifference, is a Mitsubishi Mirage of 1998 vintage, engine running, because to turn it off would constitute — and here one must be precise, precision being the last luxury afforded to the unemployed — a lie, and lies in this particular township have the well-documented habit of sinking directly into the Kenduskeag and resurfacing decades hence not as guilt, which would at least be Christian, but as municipal policy, which is worse.

Let us proceed, then, by tableaux, as the old dispensers of magic-lantern instruction used to proceed, one slide at a time, the slide-changer's hand trembling slightly from the accumulated weight of everything that has not yet been explained.

TABLEAU THE FIRST: IN WHICH A MAN COMMUNES WITH A CEREAL CARTON AS THOUGH IT WERE A DECEASED RELATIVE, AND A ZONING OFFICIAL DISCOVERS, TO HIS COST, THAT ROUNDNESS IS A FORM OF JURISPRUDENCE

Behind the Bangor Public Library, which watches the proceedings with the granite indifference of an edifice that has already forgiven everyone twice, One Size sits at a folding table

that was formerly a door, or possibly an altar, or — and this is the detail one is obliged to withhold judgment on, in the tradition of the great continental agnostics — a bridge, the distinction between these three prior identities having long since dissolved into what the semioticians would call an undecidable sign, and applies to the wheat-price tables of 1917 the exact tenderness a coroner applies to a body he is under no statutory obligation to identify but does so anyway, out of a fidelity so obscure it might be mistaken, by the unlettered, for madness, and is in fact merely rigor: for no system, he understands, remembers everything; no system forgets completely; and every act of remembering reshapes, with the merciless plasticity of a fever dream revising its own iconography overnight, what remains available to be remembered next.

What is visible on the carton: freight rates ascending four cents the bushel between the second and third quarter, inscribed in a hand so careful it appears to be forging its own alibi in advance of a crime not yet committed. What is not mentioned, and here the silence does the heavier freight-hauling, is the horse; the horse's opinion of the freight, which one imagines was unfavorable; and the specific acoustic signature — a low hum, somewhere near 432 cycles, though One Size would never commit so precise a figure

to paper, precision being for men with better pensions — of the silence particular to warehouses in which grain has recently stopped being counted. The rule this silence enforces, stated with the flat authority of a man who has stopped expecting to be believed: price is a story that has agreed to forget who carried it.

He annotates all this in printer's marks purloined from a font foundry that dissolved into escrow sometime during the Coolidge interregnum, that most improbable of American epochs, when the nation briefly mistook silence for competence, and affixes a QC sticker, gummed, yellowing, bearing the legend INSPECTED FOR EXCESSIVE METAPHOR — PASSED WITH ONE (1) UNACCOUNTED SPARROW, the sparrow in question having already consumed the decimal point clean out of a rainfall table, converting four-point-seven inches into a numeral that now signifies precisely nothing, a piece of arithmetic vandalism One Size regards, not without a certain patrician satisfaction, as the single most honest statistic he has filed all week, there being, in his estimation — an estimation he would defend at any length, to any committee, with the unblinking confidence of a man who has never once been asked to defend it — considerably more truth in a sparrow's appetite than in the entire apparatus of the Federal Reserve.

He does not write this down. To write it down would constitute distribution of foodstuffs without a permit, and the zoning official — a gentleman constructed, so far as one can determine through empirical observation, entirely of laminate and the residual, cargo-cult authority of forms he has personally never troubled himself to read — is already crossing Harlow Street with the gait of a man who has memorized a checklist and mistaken it, in a confusion one hesitates to call Oedipal only because the term has become so debased through overuse in faculty lounges, for a spine.

"You can't audit history without a license," says the official, in the tone of a man quoting scripture he has never opened.

"They're round," says One Size, elevating a cereal carton with the gravity of a bishop elevating the host, as though roundness constituted, in and of itself, a species of natural law superior to zoning ordinance — and here one must pause to observe, in the manner of the old dry wits who understood that the highest comedy is indistinguishable from the deepest metaphysics, that sometimes, in this particular jurisdiction, it does.

A LYRIC DIGRESSION, WITH GLOSS, FOR THOSE WHO REQUIRE THEIR EPIPHANIES FOOTNOTED

Between the freight tables arrive small formal intrusions, weather mistakenly filed in a government ledger, the way a census form might, through some clerical catastrophe, accidentally record a heartbeat instead of a household income:
Nose revised again—
even winter light requires
another mirror.
Cathedral, road, face:
all three are re-poured concrete.
None of them lied first.

On the second of these One Size refuses comment, and would regard the request for one as an impertinence roughly equivalent to asking a man to explain, in a single sentence, why he still owns his father's coat: the restoration of a face and the restoration of a nave are, upon honest accounting — and honest accounting is the only kind this archive permits itself, austerity being cheaper than candor — weathered identically, both being labor performed upon something old in the perennial hope that the old thing will consent, for a further interval, to appear as though it has not yet finished happening. The mirror in question, one notes with the cold clarity

available only to those who have studied their own reflection and found it billing them for the privilege, is not a mirror of recognition. It is a mirror of correction, financing available, and the patient, gazing into it, does not say that is me but rather, in the grammar peculiar to all such transactions, that is nearly me, billed at cost.

TABLEAU THE SECOND: IN WHICH BREAKFAST CEREAL ACQUIRES CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS, AND AN INSURANCE CLAIM FROM 1848 REFUSES, WITH REMARKABLE TENACITY, TO DIE

Nothing survives alone; this is the first and last commandment of the archive, and the cereal boxes, understanding it instinctively, have begun conducting themselves accordingly, a pulp detective paperback staining the parish ledger shelved beside it with the specific violet bruise of cheap dye, a Beechnut gum wrapper interposing itself between a love letter and the rain with the selfless competence of a Secret Service agent who has read the assignment sheet twice. Tony the Tiger — once merely orange, now orange-and-ideologically-agitated, in the manner of a man who has discovered pamphleteering late in life and will not shut up about it — has taken to annotating his own tail with citations from the Corn Laws, no longer bellowing his trademarked affirmative but instead observing, in the clipped

cadence of a man who has read entirely too much Cobbett on an empty stomach, that "tariff-protected domestic grain interests are not, in point of fact, GRRREAT for the consuming proletariat," his stripes having begun, alarmingly, to resemble picket lines, a development nobody present recalls approving, ratifying, or even discussing at committee.

Rice Krispies — Snap, Crackle, and the notoriously silent Pop — convene an emergency subcommittee on maritime insurance, the matter under review being the total loss at sea, in 1848, of forty barrels of a grain nobody living can any longer name, insured by a concern that dissolved into three better-capitalized concerns which themselves dissolved, through a bankruptcy so labyrinthine it would make a Chancery judge weep into his wig, into a fourth concern presently manufacturing photocopier toner. Pop abstains. Pop has always abstained. There are those — One Size among them, though he would never say so aloud, discretion being the only inheritance he has left unpawned — who suspect Pop of being, in the parlance of an earlier and more suspicious age, a company man.

A single pair of googly eyes, provenance unrecorded, adhesive audibly failing, migrates in the night from Issue No. 44 to Issue No. 45 and

appoints itself, without ballot, without campaign, without so much as a press release, Unofficial Editor of the entire enterprise — a position it discharges with a silence so total, so unimpeachable, that the silence itself has come to be regarded, by unanimous and slightly embarrassed consensus, as the single most defensible editorial position on record: for what, after all, has Googly Eyes ever claimed? Nothing. And in an archive built entirely from the wreckage of overclaiming, this restraint constitutes, one is forced to admit, a species of genius.

TABLEAU THE THIRD: IN WHICH THE LIBRARY BOXES DEMONSTRATE THAT WEATHER IS THE ONLY HONEST CURATOR, A CHILD PERFORMS AN ACT OF PERFECT DISCERNMENT, AND A RETIRED COMPOSITOR CORRECTS THE DEAD IN RED PENCIL

Understand — and this must be understood slowly, the way one understands, over the accumulated span of a marriage, that a spouse's silence was never indifference but merely a different dialect of attention — that the archive is not a vault. The archive is a weather system, and rain, entering Issue No. 47 through a seam nobody thought to caulk, does precisely what rain has always longed to do to paper, namely finish the argument the paper itself was too well-bred to finish, until the wheat-price columns

bleed sideways into a hand-drawn map of Bangor and Union Street and the year 1917 become, for the duration of one indecent damp Tuesday, the very same tributary, indistinguishable, weeping into each other with the total lack of embarrassment peculiar to bodies of water and the recently bereaved.

A child kneels at the return box with the surgical, unbudgeable focus of a jeweler and removes — this alone, nothing further, no negotiation attempted — the googly eyes. "Just these," she says, to an audience consisting of nobody, and in that flat unembellished declarative sentence resides more genuine archival theory than has been produced by the entire discipline in the past forty years, for she understands, in the marrow, what no tenured committee has yet articulated in print: that to curate is to know, with total and unsentimental precision, both what one wants and what one is prepared, without a second glance, to abandon.

A grocery receipt from 1998 enters uninvited — two percent milk, a lottery ticket, an item originally rung up as "Drunken Noodles" and struck through, in a second and evidently more considered hand, and rewritten as "Existential Wok" — and is admitted without comment, the box's entrance requirements being, in this one

particular, considerably more forgiving than those of any accredited university this correspondent has had occasion to audit. A retired compositor, whose union has not existed in a form he would recognize since roughly the Ford administration, arrives before dawn, corrects One Size's proofreading marks in red pencil with the unhurried authority of a man settling a very old score with typography itself, and departs without signing his work — not vandalism, one insists, but peer review conducted by ghosts, filed, appropriately, under the category reserved for pressures that remain unavailable yet continue, from beneath the ground, to shape everything built above them: the buried weight of a trade that succeeded itself so thoroughly into disappearance that its only remaining evidence is the correction it can no longer resist making.

Wind, one night, reorganizes the entire contents of Issue No. 47 into six geographically unrelated neighborhoods. One Size does not correct this. He files it, instead, as documentary proof that the city has been quietly doing precisely this to itself for two full centuries, and that the wind, in a single evening, unassisted, without so much as a committee meeting, has achieved what several successive mayoral administrations failed, across

cumulative decades of sincere and well-funded effort, to accomplish through zoning.

TABLEAU THE FOURTH: A CONVERSATION CONDUCTED PRIMARILY IN SUBTEXT, INSIDE A MITSUBISHI MIRAGE, WHILE A PHEASANT COMMITS AN ACT OF UNWITNESSED VANDALISM THAT WILL LATER BE MISTAKEN FOR SCRIPTURE

Inside the Mirage, which idles because silence remains, structurally, a lie, Somsak occupies the passenger seat beneath a disco light whose ballast whines at a frequency this correspondent declines to specify, having burned that particular bridge with the sparrow already, and the Xerox WorkCentre 5225 in the rear compartment produces its low continuous liturgy, a sound indistinguishable, at this hour, from three hundred sawmills arriving, after a century and a half of disagreement, at a rare and total consensus: namely, to stop.

"The structure holds," Somsak says, and one must resist — though it costs something, resisting — the temptation to gloss this too eagerly, for the surface content is merely architectural (the camper's shell remains intact) while the submerged content, the freight riding beneath the freight, addresses itself to something considerably less structural and considerably

more devastating: you are still here, and that, against every reasonable actuarial expectation, is not nothing.

"The paper's temporary," replies One Size, flipping a griddle-cake balanced with theological improbability on the dashboard. "The idea of the paper is the architecture." Surface content: a claim about the relative durability of zines versus systems. Submerged content, the freight beneath the freight beneath that freight: I understand that no one is going to thank me for this, I have made my peace with that fact through a process too tedious to relate, and what I require from you now, this instant, is only that you notice I have made this peace, because a peace unnoticed is merely another form of unfiled grief.

Carl's voice — familiar enough to be routinely mistaken, by those not paying sufficiently close attention, for conscience, smelling faintly, unmistakably, of convenience — surfaces briefly in the disco light's reflection off the dashboard vinyl.

"End it," says Carl. "Save time. Conclude the process."

Surface content: an efficiency recommendation, delivered in the register of a consultant who bills

by the half-hour. Submerged content, and here one abandons all pretense of restraint, because the freight is simply too large to be handled with tongs: your continued existence constitutes an inconvenience to a system that has already, in a meeting you were not invited to, decided how this concludes.

One Size does not answer him. He flips another pancake. It lands wrong, which is to say correctly, and this — let the record show, let it be entered into whatever ledger survives the century — is the only rebuttal Carl has never once, in the entire documented history of their acquaintance, learned to counter: continuation without acknowledgment, the whole of the caretaker's ethics compressed, with an economy no seminar could improve upon, into a single flick of the wrist.

The Red Golden Pheasant, procured for three bottles of vodka of a pungency this correspondent will not further characterize and a promise of solvency it has honored in no particular whatsoever, launches itself from the storage bins and stamps one oily, indignant, entirely unpremeditated footprint across the freshest copy in the tray — a signature, one is compelled to observe, considerably more binding than anything a notary has ever affixed a seal to.

"Skrawk," says the pheasant.

Surface content: an avian noise. Submerged content: you are archiving the accident and mistaking it, as you have mistaken it for years, for the intention — and I say this with love, or with whatever a pheasant is permitted to call love under the terms of its residency.

TABLEAU THE FIFTH: THE VALISE, WHICH HAS NEVER ONCE, SINCE ITS ARRIVAL AT ELLIS ISLAND IN THE YEAR 1898, AGREED TO CLOSE PROPERLY, IS REOPENED WITHOUT THE SLIGHTEST INTENTION OF RESOLUTION

Understand the valise not as container but as field, in the fullest sense the physicists and, more usefully, the psychoanalysts intend by that term: a field of overlapping histories declining, out of what can only be called constitutional stubbornness, to collapse into any single authorized narrative. Elias filled it, upon arrival, with riddles whose solutions altered hour by hour, a form of intellectual property no patent office would ever consent to register. Harlan Sr. added, in successive and increasingly desperate depositions, economics, music, weather, labor — each discipline arriving with a promissory note of coherence it would, without exception, default upon — alongside two women, one thick, one thin,

their names withheld here not from discretion but from the simple bureaucratic fact that only the forms survive: insurance documents, temporary addresses, apologies composed with evident care and never, not once, mailed.

The father who followed mistook surface for depth with the confidence peculiar to men who have never been corrected, and packed the case with cufflinks two sizes too large and a fedora that surrendered its shape sometime before anyone thought to photograph it; the house in Portland burned in 1972, and no one now living recalls the flames themselves, only the procedures that outlasted them — relocation, silence, the sudden and structurally significant absence of objects that had, until that moment, justified their own existence merely by continuing to exist. The valise survived this, scorched but whole, in the manner of every recovered fragment, which is to say bearing, ineradicably, the evidence of the years it spent away: nothing, the archive insists, on this point and no other with total dogmatic certainty, returns unchanged. One Size inherited the object not as escape but as correction, having learned early, in a lesson no tuition could have purchased more cheaply, that explanation costs considerably more than it returns; he pinned the oversized cufflinks on regardless, understanding, with the clarity of a

man reading his own horoscope written by someone he trusts, that alignment in this family has never required fit, only insistence. There was a pulp mill; there was a meadow in which a chainsaw idled while deer regarded the proceedings with total equanimity; and there was, in that meadow, a single unrecorded thought – tools may be exchanged – which nobody present had the presumption to enter into the record as a vow, filing it instead, correctly, under seam.

A CODA, IN WHICH ONE IS FORCED, RELUCTANTLY, TO CONCEDE A CERTAIN METAPHYSICAL POINT TO THE OPPOSITION

North of the Tree Streets, unbothered by any jurisdiction this correspondent has been able to identify, a Hokkaido brown bear stands close enough to provide warmth and not one inch closer, offering presence in lieu of the rescue nobody, on reflection, actually requested – which is, upon the most exhaustive audit this office is capable of conducting, the entire and only inheritance the valise ever in fact contained. The wind moving across the empty jacket in the clearing says, first, almost; then, with the patience of an actuary, not yet; then, in a tone one hesitates to call generous only because generosity

implies a ledger somewhere being balanced, try again.

This is not, let the record reflect, an ending. The technique under discussion — one declines, again, to name it, though the reader with any acquaintance with Japanese ceramic repair will have already supplied the term unbidden — does not make broken things appear unbroken. The repair, honestly executed, remains visible. The seam is not concealed; the seam is the evidence: something was damaged; someone, against every reasonable incentive to do otherwise, cared; something, improbably, continued. The fracture is not the opposite of beauty. The fracture is the loading dock through which history is delivered, always slightly late, always missing one crate, and every subsequent restoration leaves behind fresh seams, patiently awaiting the next weather system with the equanimity of a man who has stopped expecting the rain to apologize.

Five copies of whatever document One Size is presently calling the Syllabus were accepted this week by the Free Library on Ohio Street. One was removed by an unknown citizen whose motives this office declines, on principle, to speculate about. Two were acquired by moisture and have joined the general circulatory system of the Kenduskeag, no longer documents so much as

dissolved intentions. One entered what can only be termed the bread economy outright and has not resurfaced, though a QC sticker bearing its serial number was subsequently discovered stapled, with what one can only assume was ceremonial intent, to a Slurpee cup outside a 7-Eleven that functions, by any honest accounting this correspondent is prepared to render under oath, as the last surviving tabernacle of civic sanity in a district where the toasters have begun, credibly, to unionize, and the pigeons have taken, with alarming organizational sophistication, to inquiring about dental. One copy promoted itself, without benefit of election, to Assistant Archivist, a post that did not exist prior to its self-appointment and which One Size has elected, after deliberation he would characterize as brief and this correspondent would characterize as theological, not to abolish — because the archive, when the accounts are finally reconciled, proves to be neither warehouse nor museum nor database but a neighborhood: a street, a kitchen, a workshop, a room in which the dead are prepared with more tenderness than the living generally receive, a corner of a library, a zine assembled past midnight by a man who cannot sleep and has stopped apologizing for it, a damaged object returned, patiently, to function by hands nobody photographed, a forgotten citizen remembered at precisely the correct and

otherwise unremarkable hour, a rooster asking questions the municipal code has no provision for answering, a caretaker performing one further repair before the lights fail and it falls, as it always eventually falls, to somebody else — anybody else, really, the assignment being notoriously difficult to decline — to remember to turn them back on.

The saw, one is obliged to report, is always running somewhere behind this sentence. The river is always circulating precisely what it was given, no more, no less, refusing on principle to make change. The engine — and here, at the terminus of the inquiry, one arrives finally at something resembling a finding — does not ask what the original condition of the thing might have been; it asks only what journey produced the seam presently under examination. It does not ask what may be discarded; it asks who, or what, has been quietly, without commendation, carrying the weight forward. It does not ask how the cracks might be removed; it asks, and this is the whole of its jurisprudence, distilled: what does the crack reveal?

Memory preserves the trace. Weather transforms the trace. Attention, when it can be persuaded to arrive at all, discloses the relationship. Care, finally, restores the dignity — not retroactively,

not completely, never once without cost, but restores it nonetheless, the way a pancake lands wrong and is, on that account and no other, correct; the way a valise refuses closure and is, on that account and no other, honest; the way a town agrees with itself, every single morning, before anyone has had the poor judgment to notice, to continue.

THE HENHOUSE MANIFESTO (SECOND EDITION)

A DOCUMENT RECOVERED FROM MUNICIPAL ARCHIVES, SUPPLEMENTAL FILE 734-C

PART ONE: THE ARRIVAL

Three musicians arrived at a structure that had not settled on being a coop or a co-op or a comment on the futility of naming things. The chickens—six hens and a rooster who had answered to Barnaby until he stopped answering to anything—recognized something in the microphone's chrome grille. An old face. Someone from when they'd been different birds, or the same bird repeated like a record stuck on thaw what is frozen, open the door. They recognized everything and nothing. They scratched at the dirt.

The accordion came first—not in time, exactly, but in the way some objects arrive before you're ready for them. Giuseppe had carried it across two countries and three marriages. It had been

repaired so many times that no original wood remained visible—either perfect immortality or centuries-dead without anyone informing it. The bellows wheezed like a man who'd learned to breathe wrong on purpose. As an aesthetic choice. As resistance.

Pip's guitar arrived in the VW bus, painted a shade that existed only in the imagination of people who'd already forgotten what they were imagining. The color of failure, if failure had a hex code. Pip held the guitar the way you hold a secret grown too large for your mouth—something become furniture, casting shadows with their own weather systems.

Klara appeared later. Or: the space where Klara wasn't suddenly noticed its own incompleteness, and she stepped into that noticing like stepping into a puddle that turned out to be a well that turned out to be stairs descending into archives of silence so complete that sound itself seemed amateurish. Insufficiently committed to quiet.

The chickens knew, in the way chickens know things—body-knowledge, dirt-knowledge, the awareness of creatures who've concluded that the distinction between knowing and not-knowing was invented by someone who'd never scratched the same earth twice.

PART TWO: THE FLEXI-DISC

Consider the flexi-disc. Hold it up to the fluorescent light of the municipal basement and see how thin it is—thinner than a credit card, thinner than intention.

The label had been removed and replaced so often that the original existed only as rumor: WASHINGTON SQUARE FOLK EXPERIMENT — PRIVATE DEMO, ghost-text bleeding through layers of correction fluid. Underneath, faintly, engraved by someone asleep or furious or transcendentally resigned: those same words, then nothing.

It had lived another life first. Been evidence of something. Sat in rooms where people argued whether songs could change the world, and the answer was no, then yes, then songs can fail to change the world in increasingly interesting ways. The disc had absorbed cigarette smoke from tobacco grown in fields that were themselves arguments about property. It held all that inside its thinness.

Now it sat in Maine, wrapped in the centerfold of a National Geographic from 1974—the one about the Nile—delivered by postal carriers who understood that some mail arrives through will

alone. Addresses as suggestions. The inscription: Please return to the chickens if found.

Ken kept it in the third drawer down, between the 1997 wicket-replacement forms and a coffee-stained memo about proper flag protocol. He didn't know what to do with it. He filed it under H.

PART THREE: WHAT THE CHICKENS UNDERSTOOD ABOUT BUILDINGS

There was a nail protruding from the eastern wall. Had been since 1952, when someone's grandfather drove it there to hang a feed scoop and forgot. The nail became a habit of the building—a position it held, stubbornly, against the surface's preference for smoothness.

One hen—a barred rock named Ethel, though names were flexible—contemplated this nail. Not briefly. Ethel made a practice of contemplation. And she developed an architectural opinion: buildings wish to be nests. Nests wish to be libraries. Libraries accumulate cookbooks. Cookbooks are instructions for transformation, recipes for turning raw materials into comfort. Therefore: comfort is what buildings want, eventually, once they stop pretending otherwise.

Ethel kept this opinion private for years—the privacy of secrets written in scratch-marks, visible only to those who read silence. Then Pip arrived with his microphone, and opinion became architecture. The rafters began collecting harmonies. The air thickened. Sound emerged from wood as if it had been aging there since the structure was built, waiting for permission.

The floorboards remembered conversations. Ken noticed this during his monthly inspection—the way footsteps from twenty years ago seemed to echo under newer ones. He wrote it down once, then crossed it out. Acoustic anomaly. Structural. Not actionable.

PART FOUR: THE SONGS THEY BEGAN TO FIND

The microphone hung from baling twine looped over a barn beam—dangling like a thought suspended mid-sentence. When Giuseppe wheezed the first chord, it received them.
Songs discovered themselves as sung. The first began as lullaby, became treatise on timber framing—sudden epiphany, the way wood bears weight, joints distribute force, a building as negotiation with gravity. Final verse: meditation on nests.

"Round is the wall and round is the grain,

round comes the sun and round comes the rain,
thaw what is frozen, open the door,
build something kinder than before."

Captain Claw sang without moving his mouth—the blue shark puppet, upholstery fabric and button eyes, singing in Klara's voice-or-something-that-had-learned-human-from-a-distance. The chickens kept time through presence alone. Their attention created rhythm, pulse, the temporal skeleton songs require to not just be sound-sequenced-in-air.

July. Ninety-two degrees. Humidity you could wear. The Henhouse smelled of grain-dust and old varnish and something faintly sweet that nobody could identify. Flies congregated near the doorway, considering. Outside, Broadway shimmered.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL MEMORANDUM 44-A
FROM: Office of Parks & Recreation
TO: All Personnel, West Lawn District
RE: Ongoing Acoustic Phenomena / Protocol Clarification

Effective immediately, please note the following corrections to Memorandum 31 (1998):

1. The entity referred to as "the Henhouse" shall NOT be classified as recreational facility, storage unit, or historical landmark. Its current designation remains Area of Ceremonial Obstacle (provisional).
2. Permits filed under Form 77-B (Temporary Structure, Musical) have been misfiled since 2003. Correct filing: Form 12-L (Unresolved Municipal Curiosity).
3. The Fourth Wicket maintains East Lawn status. The Fifth Wicket maintains West Lawn status. Neither wicket may be relocated without direct order from the City Council, which has declined to issue such orders since 1978.

Please destroy previous copies of this memo upon reading. File this copy in the green binder, drawer three.

THE FIFTH WICKET / THE HENHOUSE

I. MATTER / THE BINDER AND THE CARD

Somewhere between the Fourth and Fifth Wickets, a game becomes infrastructure. Play collapses into procedure. The sigh of a drawer closed so many times it forgot hands.

The green binder lived in Ken's office, which was actually a converted supply closet with a window facing the loading dock. Fluorescent light buzzed overhead—one tube flickering in the rhythm of a question. The binder had softened from decades of fingers. It smelled of mildew, carbon paper, and that persistent sweetness that might have been the air itself in summer. Ken called it the filing cabinet. Inside pressed together: institutional memory and living tradition, exchanging properties like neighbors sharing tools.

The rulebook contained three sentences:
The Fourth Wicket shall occupy the East Lawn.
The Fifth Wicket shall occupy the West Lawn.
Players shall cross Broadway with appropriate dignity.

Beneath the binder, bottom drawer: a yellow index card. No date. No signature. DO NOT MOVE THE FIFTH WICKET. Ken lifted its corner annually, verifying continued prohibition. He touched it indirectly, through a folded receipt.

"It's procedure," he told Darlene in payroll. Darlene stamped the holiday authorization form. "There is no holiday," she said. "There is for Broadway," Ken replied, though sometimes he

wasn't certain anymore whether the certainty was his or simply accumulated from decades of touching that card.

II. THE RETIREMENT OF MARCUS DECKER

Marcus Decker had held the crossing paddle for thirty-one years. July after July, four lanes of traffic beneath brutal sun, arm raised. His body knew the rhythm before his mind did—the particular pause when the accordion breathed, when the chickens' attention sharpened, when Broadway needed to become something other than a road.

He retired in June of 2019. Small ceremony. Sheet cake in the break room. Nobody mentioned the Henhouse because nobody knew how to mention it to someone who hadn't already learned to not-mention-it properly.

His replacement was named Yuki. Twenty-four. Transferred from Traffic Division. She read the binder on her second day, found the yellow card, asked: "So if a ball rolls onto Broadway, we stop traffic? For croquet?"

Ken hesitated. "For Broadway," he said. But he heard how it sounded now—heard the gap between explanation and understanding.

Yuki nodded. Filed it under Quirks of Assignment, Local.

First July game: she stopped traffic correctly, instinctively, the way Marcus always had. Later she admitted she'd thought it was merely ceremonial—a performance for tourists, perhaps, or tradition maintained out of municipal obstinacy. "It felt right anyway," she said. Ken wasn't sure if this counted as success or failure.

III. THE NEAR-FAILURE

Two weeks later, the ritual almost broke.

Tuesday. Muggy. The humidity sat on Bangor like a damp wool blanket. Game scheduled for noon. Livestream setup operational—at least nominally. IT had sent someone new, an intern named Dev who'd graduated from UMaine in May and kept checking his phone for texts from his girlfriend. Eleven forty-five: accordion didn't open. Giuseppe's fingers stiffened in the heat. The instrument wheezed once, collapsed inward like a lung forgetting its purpose.

Eleven fifty: Pip's guitar string snapped. Third string, G, the one that carries harmony. He stared

at the broken end curling upward, snake-like. No replacement in the case.

Eleven fifty-five: Klara was there—invisible-but-present, absence-shaped—but her voice wouldn't come. Something about the atmospheric pressure. Something about the day refusing permission.

Dev adjusted the camera angle. Checked the connection. Nothing to transmit. The livestream showed empty lawn, chickens milling, a cricket match without crickets.

Ken watched from the closet-office. His stomach tightened. This is it, he thought. This is when it stops. Thirty-seven years of filing and permitting and looking the other way, and it stops because of heat and a broken string and a Tuesday in July.

Then:
A mail truck pulled to the curb. Driver emerged—new guy, maybe six months on the route—carrying a package wrapped in newspaper, secured with twine. Addressed to: HENHOUSE / BROADWAY WEST / BANGOR.

No zip code. No street number. The driver looked confused. Found Yuki at her post. "Where do I—"

She took the package. Set it on the folding table near the Fourth Wicket. "Thanks."
Inside: the flexi-disc. The one from Part Two. The one that had been filed under H in drawer three except apparently it hadn't been—it had been somewhere else, circulating, arriving again like a letter that refused delivery the first time.

Giuseppe opened the package. Saw the disc. Saw the ghost-label: WASHINGTON SQUARE FOLK EXPERIMENT — PRIVATE DEMO. His face changed. Not expression, exactly—more like recognition arriving from a distance.
He picked up the accordion. Pressed a chord. This time, the sound came.

Not full strength. Tentative. But present.
Pip restrung the guitar using a length of the package's twine—the city's own delivery material repurposed into music. It sounded wrong and therefore right. Klara found whatever channel her voice traveled on. The puppets opened mouths they didn't technically possess.

Yuki raised the paddle. Broadway halted. A box-truck driver leaned out his window. "Little left!"
Mildred nodded from the West Lawn. "Noted."
Dev's camera caught all of it—the stuttering start, the twine-string's strange harmonic, the chickens reorganizing themselves into rhythm like dancers

remembering choreography. The IT annual report would note: CURRENT INTERFERENCE APPEARING CULTURAL RATHER THAN ELECTRONIC. MAINTAIN CURRENT OBSERVATION STATUS.

Afterward, Ken sat in his closet with the door closed. Fluorescent light flickering its question-mark pattern. He took out the yellow card. Studied it. Then—without deciding to—he turned it over.

On the back, in handwriting older than his employment: IT REMEMBERS IF YOU REMEMBER.

He put the card back. Face-up. In the drawer. Under the binder.

IV. THE CONSTITUTION OF THE WEST LAWN

The Henhouse operated in temporal dimensions that municipal surveys declined to map. Library disguised as coop. Archive that smelled like feed and dust and the sweetness no one could name. The hens' constitution existed on the reverse of a China Wok Ball Recovery Agreement—front: legal instrument regarding restaurant-property boundaries; back: founding charter scratched in pen that might have been borrowed in urgency.

Ken stopped explaining it years ago. New interns asked; he tapped the glass of the coop. "Article One covers that."

They looked at the scratching. Looked back at him. Stopped asking.

Article Three—THE FIFTH WICKET SHALL NOT BE MOVED—had shifted from mystery to coordinate. Fixed point. The rest of Bangor oriented around it mostly unconsciously, the way bodies orient around gravity without consulting physics.

But coordinates shift. Maps get updated. A new city manager transferred in from Portland, requested GIS review of all West Lawn designations. Found the green smudge that software couldn't erase. Flagged it for correction. The memo reached Ken's desk on a Thursday. Proposed resolution: Reclassify Area of Ceremonial Obstacle as Vacant Lot (Pending Development Review).

He read it three times. Set it facedown under the binder. Forgot to process it.

Four months later, the city manager followed up.

"That smudge on the map," she said. "What is it?"

Ken considered his options. "Historical anomaly," he said. "Pre-dates current zoning. Would require Council review. Research-intensive. Cost-prohibitive."

She nodded. Made a note. The memo disappeared into a subfolder that nobody would open for seven years.

Some preservations happen through maintenance. Others happen through bureaucratic friction. Ken wasn't sure which category he occupied. He suspected both. He suspected neither mattered, provided the card stayed in the drawer and the chickens kept their constitutional sessions and the accordion wheezed each July as if breathing itself were a political act.

V. RESIDUE

China Wok marked jurisdiction's edge. The Ball Recovery Agreement—dual-purpose document—stipulated any ball entering the restaurant remained playable. This had been negotiated in 1985 between the City Attorney and Mr. Chen's niece, who spoke better English than her uncle and worse patience. Terms accepted. Signed. Filed somewhere in the basement under C or

possibly S for Sports, Adjacent Commercial Concerns Regarding.

Three balls in the wicker basket behind the register: grease-stained; dented; untouched. Terence—counter staff, seventeen, working summer before college—distrusted the clean one. "Nothing comes back that clean." The owner smiled. Maybe it had gentle afternoon.

That night, the custodian found the yellow index card on the floor beneath the cabinet. Corner bent. She didn't know why it mattered—new hire, third week, still learning which doors stuck and which thermostats lied. She smoothed the corner with her thumb. Returned it to the drawer.

DO NOT MOVE THE FIFTH WICKET.

She didn't need the history to understand load-bearing structures. Some things hold weight. You can feel it in your hand.

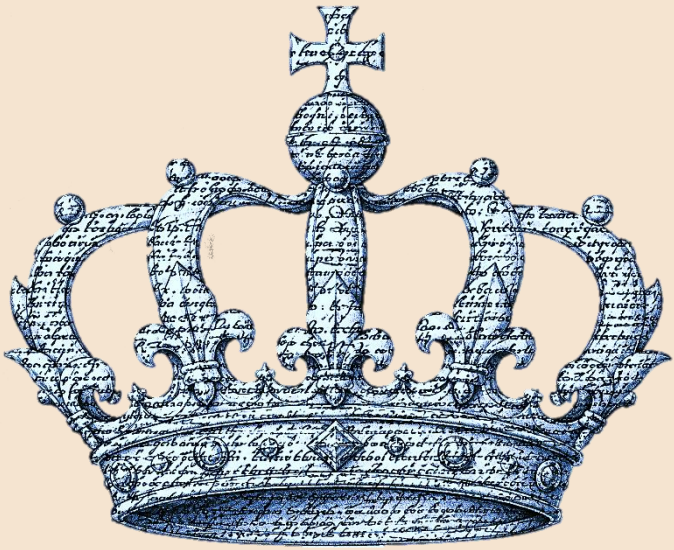
Outside, Broadway hummed its evening traffic. Streetlights flickered on in sequence, electrical pulse mimicking biological rhythm. The Henhouse exhaled—or the night exhaled through it—accordion expanding once in darkness, contracting, unplayed but present, instrument remembering its shape.

Yuki walked home past the West Lawn. Stopped. Listened. Heard nothing unusual, but also: something. A texture in the silence. A question the air was asking.

She would learn to answer it with a paddle, in July, body becoming infrastructure that infrastructure cannot provide. Cities persist because someone replaces towels. Logs potholes. Holds the paddle while wooden ball considers gap between lanes as philosophy.

The chickens scratched their hyphen into dirt. constitutional precedent. Architectural fact. Nest becoming library becoming cookbook becoming comfort becoming next year's July, next year's near-failure quietly repaired by accumulated habit, next year's intern learning to not ask, next year's package arriving wrapped in newspaper, addressed to nowhere specific, finding its destination anyway.

Play continued.
It always did.



21 Margins for a King Who Does Not Come

By Lux Brand

The Emperor, having lately sent hither a nobleman to make overtures touching matters of high consequence, and now, by report of his ambassador, determining to send two other personages of great honour for the more certain and special entreaty of the same, appears at first as a simple diplomatic fact: an imperial initiative, legible within the long coercive weather of sixteenth-century Christendom, where dynastic necessity, confessional fracture, and continental rivalry formed the milieu in which every embassy moved. Such missions did not begin relations; they entered channels already cut by marriage treaties, papal affronts, trade ambitions, military anxieties, and the afterclimate of Rome's sack. The noblemen therefore arrive not as beginnings but as visible indices of an underground arrangement older than their boots.

[Margin, Geo Metro dealer, Route 17 Auto Plaza: Clean title on these emissaries in theory, but the undercarriage tells the truth. Multiple prior owners. Diplomatic mileage rolled back. Public weal listed as standard equipment; actually aftermarket.]

Yet to call them arrivals is already to grant too much body to what is partly vapor. They come as titles, as announced figures, as heraldic pressure

before presence: not men, not yet, but the place reserved for men in a sentence swollen with purpose. Christendom itself flickers here as one of those grand nouns that survive by bleaching. Public weal, benefit of all – the phrase spreads its cloth, and beneath it the knives knock against the table.

[Margin, dead Elvis impersonator: Thank you, thank you very much, but the spotlight is on the cape before the man enters. A title walks in first.

The body catches up later, if it can.]

Because of their coming, Henry says, it shall be expedient that he be in those parts, as much for their honourable entertainment – of the best sort, for his honour and that of the realm – as for the speedy conclusion of the matters proposed. This is not mere courtly upholstery. In monarchical practice, hospitality functioned as governance by other means: a managed display of solvency, order, precedence, and self-possession, by which a realm advertised that its surface remained coherent even when its roots were in dispute. Banquet, lodging, ceremonial sequence, audience chamber, gift exchange – these were not decorations on politics but instruments inside it.

[Margin, cleaning lady: Best sort means the silver polished even if the kitchen is frightened. It means nobody sees the corners.]
And still the "best sort" withdraws as one reaches for it. Best according to whom, and for what emptiness at center? Honour entertains honour; the word bows to itself in a mirrored hall. The guests are almost shadows cast by protocol before they become men of appetite, and the feast itself appears as a bright skin stretched over subterranean debts. One says the realm receives; one does not say what hunger is doing under the floorboards.

[Margin, naturopath in his mother's garage practice: Surface presentation excellent, but the system shows chronic depletion. The feast is stimulation laid over deficiency. I would ask about sleep, bowels, and hidden inflammation.]

A second cause for deferral or altered presence lies in the Queen's condition: she is quick with child, and for this thanks are rendered to Almighty God. The sentence then folds inward to reassure: she is of such loving inclination and reverend conformity that she can content and quiet herself with whatever the King shall determine. Here the archive becomes almost too legible. The biological event — pregnancy — is immediately absorbed into dynastic arithmetic

and domestic hierarchy. The female body appears as both vessel of succession and proof-text of obedience. Tudor monarchy, under the pressure Henry himself had generated through prior marriages, annulments, executions, and failed gestations, reads every swelling womb as a national weather front.
[Margin, naturopath in his mother's garage practice: Everyone speaks of destiny and almost no one of the body. Stress chemistry matters. Grief lodges in tissue. A kingdom will call it providence when the pulse is telling another story.]

And then no abstraction is enough. A woman is carrying a child. There: the fact stands before all the lacquered causal indexing can powder it into policy. Catherine's losses do not vanish because another queen is praised. Anne's neck does not stop existing because gratitude is offered to God. The unborn child is already overburdened with all the kingdom's counterfeit steadiness.
[Margin, cleaning lady: Men write around the body. The sheets do not.]

Within six months, we are told, the only serious domestic trouble of the reign was ended. Norfolk remained in the north till September 1537 to settle the country and administer justice; yet the promised northern parliament was never held,

nor did the King visit the disaffected counties; the destruction of the monasteries proceeded, and Cromwell remained in power. By strict administrative measure this can be called closure: rebellion dispersed, punitive force installed, legal process resumed, central authority outwardly intact. But the sequence itself supplies the contradiction. Settlement without visit, promise without parliament, justice concurrent with mass institutional demolition — these are not signs of healed fabric so much as indices of coercive continuity. The state centralizes by naming the wound closed while deepening the conditions that opened it.

[Margin, Geo Metro dealer, Route 17 Auto Plaza: Vehicle marked repaired after major collision, but frame still pulls right. Customer advised issue resolved because the dashboard light is off.]

Ended. A word like a lid held down by both hands. The north does not vanish because London perfects a tense. Parliament not held: there is your zero, your white square, your place at table with no plate set down. The monasteries, meanwhile, go on dying their long death, though stones have a vulgar persistence and old charity clings to roads and kitchens and memory long after title has changed hands. If the country was

settled, it was settled the way silt settles after flood — not peace, deposition.

[Margin, dead Elvis impersonator: Folks say the show is over because the band has stopped, but the room is still humming. The chairs remember.] The extracts from Henry's letter of February 22 are then introduced as evidence of the ruthless measures taken to prevent further outbreaks, with the additional suggestion that dispossessed monks, perhaps even more than in Yorkshire, played a large role in stirring up the people. Such framing reflects state causality at work: assign agency where repression can most usefully justify itself. Yet this does not make the monks irrelevant. Their houses had been economic nodes, ritual centers, employers, almsgivers, archives, and habits of belonging. To dispossess such figures was not simply to remove a doctrine but to tear a root system through which villages had long exchanged sustenance, information, prestige, and grievance.

[Margin, cleaning lady: When they say a place is empty now, they forget who used to eat there, pray there, ask for help there.]

"Stirring up the people" — yes, that smooth ladle of official soup. As if the people were a pot to be spooned one way or the other by whichever

cassocked hand happened nearest the handle. But loss had already done its stirring. Hunger had done it. Humiliation had done it. The seizure of bells, vestments, cattle, rents, books, plate, bread, memory — all that rummage-rabble, all that crownclutch and monkmuck and lawjaw — had gone rootling through the ground long before any man whispered treason in a lane. O archive, you old cabinet of polished evasions, stop varnishing the splinters and call the breaking broken.

[Margin, dead Elvis impersonator: That is the part where the song tears a little and the crowd hears the true note.]
Carlisle.

[Margin, cleaning lady: A place name can hold more dirt than a whole speech.]

Right trusty and right entirely beloved Cousin, We greet you well. Henry's formula opens as formulas do: not because feeling overflows but because governance requires repetitive recognizability. The letter acknowledges correspondence received both directly and through the Lord Privy Seal, and praises discreet proceeding and joyful loyalty upon news of the Queen's quickening. In epistolary monarchy, such phrases perform more than courtesy. They

classify relationship, assign rank, secure channels, and turn scattered provincial acts into a legible system of service under the crown. The very act of greeting is an assertion that the network remains intact.

[Margin, Geo Metro dealer, Route 17 Auto Plaza: Standard opening package. Factory-issued politeness. Necessary for resale value.]
But the greeting is also a curtain so habitual it has gone nearly transparent. "Right trusty" is a title trying to become a climate. "Beloved" is bureaucracy borrowing the mouth of kinship.
And still one must not over-subtract: words used instrumentally are not therefore empty. Repetition can be both formula and need. Under stress, regimes cling to salutations because names must keep holding where roads, abbeys, and promises do not.
[Margin, dead Elvis impersonator: Sometimes the old line still works because everybody needs it to work one more night.]

In February there was a rising in Cumberland and Westmorland; it was immediately dealt with, and martial law was proclaimed throughout the north by the Duke of Norfolk. That immediacy matters. Swift proclamation of martial law indicates not calm mastery but recognition that ordinary legal and symbolic exchanges no longer suffice. Where

customary obedience weakens, force must become not merely punitive but atmospheric. Norfolk's intervention thus belongs to the long Tudor habit of converting local disturbance into exemplary theater: repression as restoration staged before both participants and observers.

[Margin, Geo Metro dealer, Route 17 Auto Plaza: When the brakes fail, some sellers lean on the horn. Noise mistaken for control.]

Martial law, yes, the realm unsheathing itself and calling the blade a blanket. And here the machine starts clattering again — determinism counting causes like coffin nails, negation whisking away the corpse into scented absence, elegy standing in the corner already wet-eyed — and into that scholar's contraption bursts the fourth complaint with its greasy wrench: theory, tripetaled pifflecart, rootrot rubric racket, parchment-pomaded causemonger and void-vender and sobsacristan all yoked in one squealing chassis; determinism with a wig on, negation in lace cuffs, holy grief selling onions at the syntax fair — and I, worse than all, wiring the lot together with archive-dust and spite, asking the reader to sit still while I tune my little history-hurdygurdy over a field of hanging men. Condemn the explanatory engine, condemn the white-ink chamber, condemn the earned tear, condemn the

smugness that smells itself composing. There were arrests. There were ropes. There was mud. [Margin, dead Elvis impersonator: Even the band can get angry at the arrangement. Then the lights come up and there is only the floor, the sweat, the wires.]

[Margin, cleaning lady: After all the words, someone still has to wash the mud at the door.] And whereas the recipient desired to know the King's pleasure regarding his reception and the number of men who should attend upon him from those parts, the King, after consulting Council and recalling the present state of things, thought it more convenient, for sundry causes, to defer his journey into the north until another year. Politically this is one of the clearest facts in the whole bundle. The progress was not omitted accidentally; it was suspended because royal embodiment could not safely pass into a territory not yet truly reintegrated. A king's visit is not tourism. It is a test of whether symbolic sovereignty can inhabit space without extraordinary protection. Deferment therefore records the limits of proclaimed settlement.

[Margin, Geo Metro dealer, Route 17 Auto Plaza: Seller declines road test in that neighborhood. Says timing issue, scheduling issue, inventory

issue. Means he does not trust the vehicle or the street.]

He does not come. That is the sentence underneath the sentence. For all the schedules, styles, remembrances, consultations, and careful civilities, the body that claims the land does not enter it. The north must imagine its king through paper because paper is safer than flesh. There are years when a monarch's absence says more truth than his presence could afford.

[Margin, cleaning lady: If he were truly expected, the room would be different.]
Another letter: Right trusty and right entirely beloved Cousin, We greet you well. Henry reports receiving news of a new assembly in Westmorland, praises the prudent determination taken for its repression, and through Sir Ralph Evers commends the valiant heart and acceptable service of Sir Christopher Dacres in overthrowing the traitors and rebels, who had assaulted Carlisle. The rhetoric here is disciplinary bookkeeping raised to the level of royal speech. Named intermediaries and named loyalists are stitched into a chain of attribution so that local violence can be narrated as service successfully rendered upward. The center must continuously convert dispersed action into authored obedience.

[Margin, Geo Metro dealer, Route 17 Auto Plaza: Full service history assembled for confidence. Names, dates, signatures. A paper chain can look stronger than the axle.]

The list grows: Thomas Clifford in the chase, the nobles, gentlemen, and honest men of York and elsewhere, all praised for readiness, forwardness, hearty goodwill in serving against the rebels, had the rebels stayed together long enough to be met in force. Such catalogues are not accidental excess. They distribute reward in advance, dignify compliance, and declare a loyal social majority against which the insurgent body can be rendered both criminal and isolated. Yet one phrase spoils perfect control: "if they had tarried together." The enemy's dispersal reveals mobility the crown can punish only intermittently. Rebellion need not endure in concentrated form to remain structurally alive.

[Margin, naturopath in his mother's garage practice: Symptoms migrate. If you only treat the visible flare, the condition relocates.]

So many good wills, so many hearty readies, so many tractable gentlemen standing at attention inside the royal syntax like little lead saints. And still the rebels do not politely remain in paragraph formation for the convenience of their

repression. They break, scatter, seep, lane off, hedge-hop, cousin-run, barn-hide, rumor-ride. Surface drift, yes, but under it routes already known: who trusts whom, whose cousin will feed you, which priory wall still shelters, which field edge bends toward dusk. The state writes forests of loyalty because the actual forest will not stand still for inventory.

[Margin, dead Elvis impersonator: You can print the set list, but the crowd will still move where the feeling sends it.]

For answer whereunto, Henry assures his cousin that in earnestly advancing the repression and pursuit of the traitors, by personal preparation and by hearty letters to Sir Christopher Dacres, he has done such thankful and acceptable service as shall never be put in oblivion. This is patronage speaking in the future tense of memory. Service becomes durable insofar as it is entered into the crown's archive of favor. To be remembered by the sovereign is to receive not merely gratitude but potential claim upon advancement, protection, or continued trust. Such memory is a currency of governance.

[Margin, Geo Metro dealer, Route 17 Auto Plaza: Preferred customer file opened. Benefits may apply while management remains unchanged.]

But no memory promised by power is innocent. "Never in oblivion" is one of those phrases that shine hardest where forgetting is busiest. Courts remember tactically. They preserve what can still circulate. Men who have done faithful service may yet fall when the weather changes, and the same ink that keeps a name from oblivion can later drown it under another heading. Still — and this matters — men acted for such sentences. They staked danger on the chance of being held in a king's mind as if in a ledger of grace.

[Margin, cleaning lady: People keep scraps because they hope a name written down might save them later.]

Then comes the doctrinal knot: the King takes contentment in hearing from sundry servants and good subjects how earnestly the cousin advances the truth and declares the great usurpation of the Bishops of Rome in this realm. Here political loyalty and confessional assertion are fused by decree. To uphold the King is to advance truth; to resist papal usurpation is to inhabit that truth properly. The formula is powerful because it attempts to transform a contested settlement into a natural identity. But the need to keep saying so is itself evidence that compatibility was not uniformly rooted. In many local worlds, obedience to crown, fidelity to old religion,

memory of monastic care, and hatred of innovation did not sort neatly into the official pattern.
[Margin, naturopath in his mother's garage practice: When a body repeats I am well, I listen more closely, not less.]

Truth, they call it, and the word comes in wearing confiscated silver. Yet the sentence cannot wholly abolish the human need it exploits. People wanted truth, not merely advantage. They wanted worship to mean something, law to mean something, allegiance to mean something. This is why the fracture was so violent: not because nobody believed, but because too many did, and not all in the same order.
[Margin, dead Elvis impersonator: They were not only following a tune. They were trying to find the key.]

If the two texts — the historical account and the rewoven drift audit — are made to stand together, what emerges is not a smooth allegory but a pressured system of recurring structures. The Emperor's noblemen, the Queen quick with child, the rising in Cumberland, Norfolk's martial law, the unheld northern parliament, the dispossessed monks, the letters of February 22, Dacres at Carlisle, the promise against oblivion: each is a local manifestation of larger inherited violence

and of repeated attempts to narrate that violence as order. Some correspondences hold strongly. Pregnancy does connect to dynastic panic. Monastic dissolution does connect to unrest. Epistolary praise does connect to state metabolism. Other links must remain refused. Not every absence is symbolic bounty; some are merely absences, some severed roots, some unbridgeable silences.

[Margin, cleaning lady: Some things connect. Some things are simply gone.]

And at last the plainest thing: the Pilgrimage of Grace was not over because the proclamation said it was over. It persisted in delayed visits, broken assurances, confiscated buildings, rewarded informers, surviving resentments, and the child who would inherit a realm made brittle by the methods used to secure it.

[Margin, Geo Metro dealer, Route 17 Auto Plaza: Sale closed on paper. Mechanical issue continues.]
Edward.

[Margin, dead Elvis impersonator: The name remains after the band has packed up.]

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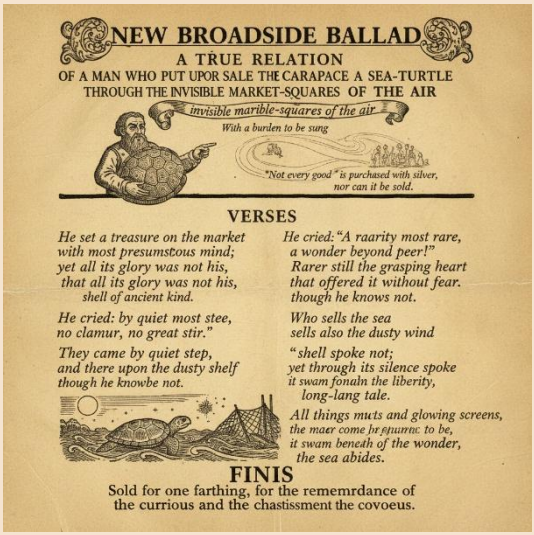

NEW BROADSIDE BALLAD

A TRUE RELATION

OF A MAN WHO PUT UPOR SALE THE CARAPACE A SEA-TURTLE THROUGH THE INVISIBLE MARKET-SQUARES OF THE AIR

invisible marible-squares of the air

With a burden to be sung

"Not every good" is purchased with silver, nor can it be sold.

VERSES

He set a treasure on the market
with most presumstous mind;
yet all its glory was not his,
that all its glory was not his,
shell of ancient kind.

He cried: by quiet most stee,
no clamur, no great stir."

They came by quiet step,
and there upon the dusty shelf
though he knowbe not.

He cried: "A raarity most rare,
a wonder beyond peer!"
Rarer still the grasping heart
that offered it without fear.
though he knows not.

Who sells the sea
sells also the dusty wind

"shell spoke not;
yet through its silence spoke
it swam fonaln the liberity,
long-lang tale.

All things muts and glowing screens,
the maer come hr eturnv. to be,
it swam beneath of the wonder,
the sea abides.

FINIS

Sold for one farthing, for the rememrdance of the currious and the chastissment the covoeus.

THE PANOPTICON INSTITUTE *for* RECURSIVE INQUIRY

(FOWL FEATHERED REVIEW / BACKPAGE BROADSIDE EDITION / VOL. IX: THE BUREAU OF ERRANT KNOWLEDGE)

BEHOLD THE CURIOUS CALLING OF ERRANT SCHOLARS, DREAMERS, AND UNREGISTERED THINKERS!
A MARVEL OF MODERN ARCANA DISGUISED AS AN INSTITUTE OF LEARNING!

HEY—YOU—YES YOU WITH THE THINKING FACE AND THE QUESTIONABLE FUTURE—
step forth, step sideways, step entirely out of sequence—
the PANOPTICON INSTITUTE FOR RECURSIVE INQUIRY is now enrolling, unenrolling, re-enrolling, and generally

confounding the very ledgers of destiny itself in a low-ceiling civic zone between a defunct department store, a reflexology parlor of uncertain doctrine, and a vending machine that occasionally produces annotations instead of snacks.

🔊 HEAR THE ANNOUNCEMENT IN TRIPLICATE, WRITTEN IN SNOW AND STATIC:

"We got knowledge so deep it requires a snorkel, a ladder, and a provisional understanding of your own biography!"

"HERE COMES THE JUDGE—AND HE HAS NOT YET DECIDED WHETHER YOU ARE A QUESTION OR A DOCUMENT!"

"THE SYLLABUS WAS LAST SEEN NEGOTIATING ITS OWN LEGIBILITY IN A CORRIDOR OF UNSTABLE LIGHTING!"

⚠ STEP FORTH, SEEKER OF PECULIAR WISDOM! ⚠

FOR HERE ARE OFFERED:

diplomas that precede their instruction
lectures delivered in fractured continental weather patterns
metaphysics served in chipped institutional porcelain
accreditation so irregular it circles back into legitimacy by misadventure

CALL NOW—OR DO NOT—THE TELEPHONE IS ALREADY RECORDING YOUR INTENTIONS IN DUPLICATE.

A Most Extraordinary And Somewhat Forbidden Treatise Upon Wandering Signifiers, Being Also A Fluxus Instruction Set, Crackpot Alchemical Tablet, and Educational Relic of The Lower Halls

☩ Article I — Of Drunken Signification and The Staggering Letter

Wherein It Is Proved That Meaning Moves Like A Disbanded Regiment Through Rain

The signifier no longer points.
It stumbles.
It reels through language like a tired herald who has forgotten which kingdom he serves.
Meaning is not delivered.
It is spilled.

☩ Article II — Of The Low Institutes of Broken Halls and Improvised Learning Wherein Education Occurs Without Permission or Stability

Education is not transmitted.
It is:
shouted through cracked brass speaking horns
written on the reverse of expired municipal forms
whispered by instructors who may themselves be misunderstandings
The classroom is wherever attention refuses to remain seated.

☩ Article III — Of Crackpot Alchemy Most High and Questionable Declaration of Transmutation By Error and Persistent Misreading

All substances are symbolic until they misbehave.
All symbols are material until they collapse under their own enthusiasm.
Gold is what happens when:
failure persists long enough to be mistaken for method
method forgets its function and becomes decorative
decoration begins issuing instructions

☩ Article IV — Of Fluxus Instruction Most Radical And Unauthorized Command for Performative Disassembly of Text and Object

Take heed:
cut the text into fragments

rearrange without consultation
affix fragments to a radiator or other warm
bureaucratic surface
allow weather to annotate the result
declare it an examination artifact

☩ Article V — Of The Mirror That Refuses To Stay Still

Note On The Subject as Misfiled Echo in Administrative Space

The subject is:
a clerical error that learned to speak in complete sentences.
Desire is:
paperwork missing its explanation
corridors reflecting themselves incorrectly
diplomas that already exist but await recognition

NOSCE TE IPSUM, MISREAD IT WELL.

ERRARE HUMANUM, PERSISTERE MAGISTERIUM.

THE

PANOPTICON INSTITUTE FOR RECURSIVE INQUIRY

BUREAU OF ERRANT KNOWLEDGE & IMPROBABLE CERTIFICATION

PERAMBULA, ERRA, RIDE, RUMINA.

SAPIENTIA NON CAPTUR. SED COLLIGITUR.

DISCIPULUS ERRATICUS, MAGISTER NULLIUS.

LINGUA EST LABYRINTHUS.

TESTIMONIUM MIRABILIS ET ERRATICUM

BE IT KNOWN THROUGHOUT ALL QUIET CORRIDORS,
UNSTABLE HALLS, AND UNREGISTERED STUDY ZONES:

THAT THE BEARER HEREIN NAMED

YOUR NAME HERE

HATH PASSED THROUGH THE THREE-FOLD STRANGE EXAMINATION:

THE ADVERTISEMENT MOST DELIRIOUS | THE MANIFESTO MOST FRACTURED | THE OBJECT MOST IMPROBABLE

FIELD OF STRANGE STUDIES

- ☐ Minor Arcana Bureaucratic Distortion
- ☐ Linguistic Drift and Skaldic Compression Arts
- ☐ Applied Vaudeville Ontology
- ☐ Fluxus Instructional Disassembly Practice
- ☐ Crackpot Alchemical Reasoning (Unregulated but Functional)
- ☐ Diner Semiotics & Jukebox Cosmology

METHOD OF CERTIFICATION

INSTITUTUM ERRATICUM

By means of:

- sustained misreading of unstable instruction fields
- extraction of coherence from contradictory text masses
- recognition of hidden instruction beneath apparent nonsense
- endurance of semantic turbulence without withdrawal
- acceptance of humor at structurally inappropriate moments

LITTERA FUGIT SENSUS MANET

DECLARATION OF AUTHORITY

This diploma is hereby proclaimed:

- ☐ not accredited in any jurisdiction
- ☐ not unaccredited in any stable sense but misreading

It is valid only in:

- marginalia of uncertain provenance
- basements where fluorescent lighting hesitates
- kiosks of doubtful municipal standing
- and any place where language begins behaving like weather

FINAL CLAUSE OF RECOGNITION

THOU HAST NOT RECEIVED THIS DIPLOMA.
THOU HAST ONLY NOTICED THAT IT WAS ALREADY
BEING CUT OUT OF THE PAGE BEFORE THOU BEGANST TO READ.

TEMPORIS EDAX DIPLOMA MANET

NON SCHOLAE SED VITAE DISCIMUS

ARCHIVIST OF ACCIDENTAL RECORDS

REGISTRAR OF UNSTABLE MEANING

CUT HERE • FRAME HERE • MISREAD FOREVER